Reliving Memoirs (重温回忆录)

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by xxwylzwangxian

Summary

Receiving an unexpected message from an unknown person could surely raise some suspicions. However, the situation becomes even more perplexing when the envelope in question contains nothing but an empty sheet of paper. Invariably, the first instinct would be to discard it, but what would happen if something entirely unexpected occurred?

In the next moment, all cultivators found themselves inexplicably transported to an unknown temple. As they tried to make sense of their surroundings, a mysterious woman appeared before them and uttered the following words:

"What exactly are you all doing here? To witness what the cultivation world did to a benevolent man. To uncover the mistreatment and corruption by those in positions of power that led to the young man's tragic end without his story being heard."

Notes

Hello Everyone! This is my very first fanfiction. I've been a fan of Mo Dao Zu Shi/Grandmaster of Demonic Cultivation for a while now, and I've been reading a lot of WangXian fanfics because I'm obsessed with this adorable couple, and I'm hungry for more.

I came across two particular fanfics in AO3 that I really love. Those two were about the characters of Grandmaster of Demonic cultivation watching the series. I love those two fanfics because I like to see the characters gradually realize that Wei Wuxian is innocent and only three years old!

Reading those two fanfics inspired me to write a fanfic about it as well, but I was hesitant because writing reactions is kind of difficult, and I have to think about the characters' responses. But since I wanted this, and here I am, writing this at 1am in the morning, I will do my best. As what the Jiang sect's motto goes, "Attempt the impossible!"

So, before proceeding, I'd like to remind everyone that;

~ Because English is not my first language, please forgive me for any grammatical errors.

~ Because English is not my first language, expect me to struggle with choosing the right words or figuring out how to use words in a sentence, so I end up using simpler words rather than deeper ones.

~ This fanfic is a combination of the donghua, novel, audio drama, manhwa, and the live action. I also decided to include some scenes that are not in the novel because, well, why not?

~ I welcome constructive criticism because I do need to learn more about writing.

~ This fanfic may not be appropriate for perfectionists. As you can see, I am an imperfect writer.

~Finally, I decided to let the characters witness the past first, then proceed 13 years later. (I'm still not sure if I want to include the events following Mo Xuanyu's offer of his body to Wei Wuxian, as well as the investigation into Nie Mingjue's body parts, but I'll see what I can do.) With this arrangement, I think this will cause some issues in the future, but I'll try to make it work.

You may now proceed

The Beginning

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“Are you there, Hanguang-jun?” A voice called from outside the Jingshi.

“Yes,” Lan Wangji says as he walks to the door and opens it, revealing Lan Jingyi and Lan Sizhui.

“Good day, Hanguang-jun!” They both smiled and bowed to him.

It's been three months since the events at Guanyin Temple. Everything was peaceful, but also heart-breaking, during these three months. After learning of the crimes committed by Jin Guangyao, Lan Xichen went into seclusion, as did Jiang Wanyin. Nie Huiasang, still the famous Head-Shaker, remains the way he is, and was unsuitable for the role of 'The Chief Cultivator’.

Jin Ling was conflicted about discovering the truth. Years of believing that his parents' deaths were the fault of Wei Wuxian and Wen Ning makes him want to cry and scream. Was all of his hatred for those two worth it? Were the framed ones to blame for the hatred he feels? For this question, he does not know the answer. With his complicated feelings and the fact that he is still young, he was not suited to be The Chief Cultivator, so Lan Wangji had no choice but to take on this role.

“What's the problem?” Lan Wangji coolly asked.

“Senior Wei is at the library, waiting for you. He said he wants you to see the new talisman he made,” Lan Jingyi beams as well as Sizhui, and Lan Wangji can't help but smile. His heart warmed by the sight of these two young cultivators who admired his love.

“I'll go,” he says as he returns to the Jingshi to retrieve Bichen. Sizhui and Jingyi bowed to him once more and excused themselves.

When Lan Wangji walks into the Library, he sees a slew of papers on the floor. When Wei Wuxian felt his presence, he grinned.

“Lan Zhan, Lan Zhan! Come sit next to me and see this!” Lan Wangji's heart skipped a beat. Even now, he's still affected by his love's blinding smile. He then sits beside him as Wei Wuxian hands him the talisman he made.

“What does this do?” He inquires, intrigued. Wei Wuxian enjoyed making new talismans in his spare time, and teaching young cultivators how to hunt. Lan Qiren was opposed to this because he believes Wei Wuxian is unfit for the role, and will teach them demonic cultivation, but Lan Wangji spoke a few words with him and in the end, Lan Qiren could only grumble and walk away.

“This is probably the most difficult talisman I've ever made, and it also requires an array. This took me weeks to study and perfect this, and now it's here! I still need to test it though to see how many items I get. You see, this is what I call a Time Travel Talisman.” He said and Lan Wangji was torn between feeling awe and uneasiness at what he said.

“Aiya, before you say anything, this talisman does not transport people back in time,” Lan Wangji sighs, relieved for some reason. Then Wei Wuxian goes on. “Well, maybe it does,” Lan Wangji frowned once again, causing Wei Wuxian to laugh and kiss him in the cheeks. “BUT! A person can only travel back in time to retrieve tools. For instance, if I want to retrieve Baxia because I want it, I can simply use this talisman and paint an array to do so. However, for the time being, this talisman can only be used for three minutes. If you go over, you'll be dragged out immediately. Any desire to change the past will also be extracted from the array. Sounds cool, right?” He smiled and Lan Wangji huffs.

Despite the fact that this talisman could endanger anyone if used incorrectly, he must admit that it is quite useful. But, on the other hand, why would cultivators want to go back in time to retrieve tools when there are advanced tools in this time?

“Wei Ying.”

“Yes?” He says, his eyes shining brightly as if expecting praise, which Lan Wangji would undoubtedly give.

Lan Wangji smiles, “Excellent work.” He praises and Wei Wuxian's cheeks tinted pink as he smiles again.

“Wei Ying.”

“Yes?”

Lan Wangji stares at him, his eyes gave away a hint of amusement. “Do not attempt to retrieve Baxia.”

“Hehe, I won't, Lan Zhan,” he says, closing the gap and kissing Lan Wangji's cheeks once more before standing up.

“It’s almost noon. I will clean up first.”

“Let me help.”

“Alright.”

Wei Wuxian went to the Jingshi first after cleaning up the mess, while Lan Wangji went to the kitchen to get their food. As he made his way to the Jingshi, he noticed a couple of Lan disciples hiding near a tree. He noticed their lips moving and them whispering to each other, as if they were afraid someone would hear them. Wei Wuxian could only giggle and decided to approach them closer in order to scare them. Sizhui and Jingyi were among the Lan disciples who were listening intently to what he assumed was *‘gossip’*.

“Are you sure about that?” A Lan disciple asked and the other shakes his head.

“I’m not sure. The town folks keep talking about it.”

“You think Jin Guangyao left corpses there before he died?” Another one inquired, hands fidgeting in nervousness and worry. Wei Wuxian heard Jin Guangyao’s name so he pauses for a moment to listen.

‘How could these kids gossip about a dead person?’

Wei Wuxian sympathizes with Jin Guangyao; after all, they did had a cruel death, and even after death, their names were scorned and tarnished by people and cultivators. They never failed to spread false stories to distort the truth and leave people unsure of what to believe. Nonetheless, he refuses to forgive him and Su She for everything they've done. He leans carefully against the tree, trying not to be noticed, and listen to the gossip.

“It's possible, he did use the Stygian Tiger Amulet,” the other nods while the others considers the thought.

“No, I don't think that's possible. You say it's a rumor, correct? The town folks could be wrong,” Jingyi says, turning to Sizhui, who appears to agree with him.

“Perhaps, but how else would the corpses rise in the Burial Mounds then? Only the Stygian Tiger Amulet can control corpses,” the other Lan argued. Wei Wuxian stills when Burial Mounds and corpses are mentioned.

“The Stygian Tiger Amulet can only control corpses within a certain range,” Sizhui responded, and Jingyi nods, but the other Lan shakes his head.

“Did you happen to forget? Yunping City and Yiling are only a distance away.”

Because of this, the entire group fell silent. Wei Wuxian furrowed his brow. There's something missing. The supposed *'rumor'* makes no sense at all.

"Although Yunping City and Yiling are close, there's no way the amulet's power or control stretched that far. The Burial Mounds are a bit far from Yiling's markets, so the Stygian Tiger Amulet is not responsible for the corpses rising," Sizhui countered, and Wei Wuxian agreed. His little radish is really smart.

"Also, it had been three months since Jin Guangyao had used the amulet. In addition, the amulet had been destroyed," Jingyi adds.

"Do you think another demonic cultivator is recreating the amulet?" The other Lan shakily inquires, and Sizhui and Jingyi both cringed. They were reminded of Xue Yang, a cruel and evil bastard who pretended to be Xiao Xingchen and admired their Senior Wei. (Well, they couldn't say Xue Yang truly admired him; after all, he had intentions.)

"Don't even think about it. Only Xue Yang and Senior Wei are capable of recreating such a powerful weapon. And who in the cultivation world is skilled enough to recreate that?" Jingyi grins and crosses his arms. He will not deny Xue Yang's intelligence, despite the fact that he was an evil bastard. But he still killed pretty A-Qing so he will curse him until he dies.

The Lans smiled, "Only Senior Wei can do that."

The praise and admiration may have caused Wei Wuxian's heart to flutter.

"Well, yes, he's smart, even if he's a little annoying."

Wei Wuxian had enough listening even though he wants to snort at what Jingyi said. Him and Jin Ling are really alike that he can't help but shake his head. He slowly walks up to them and put a hand on Jingyi's shoulder, leaning close until his face is close to his ears.

“Did you know that gossip is forbidden in Cloud Recesses?”

“Ahhhh!” Jingyi screamed, scrambling close to Sizhui's side. When Wei Wuxian and Sizhui's gazes met, he tensed a bit. He's the Head Disciple of Gusu Lan for a reason, and he's here gossiping with the other Lan Disciplines. Worse, Wei Wuxian's eyes are full of amusement and mischief that he wants to run away just to avoid getting teased. However, being caught by their Senior Wei is preferable to being caught by Hanguang-jun.

“S-Senior Wei!” They all bowed, terrified and taken aback by his sudden appearance.

“Aiya, don't be too surprised! I was having a good time listening to your gossip!”

“Y-You!” Jingyi points at Wei Wuxian, his breath and heart racing despite the fact that he isn't supposed to be this shocked. “W-When did you get here?!” He spluttered, and Wei Wuxian shrugs.

“I've been here the whole time.”

“We didn't see you!” They all simultaneously half-screamed at him.

“I was hiding behind this tree the whole time,” he smirked, leaning his shoulder against the tree.

“We didn't notice your presence!”

His smirk faltered and he sighed fondly. “Did you forget what I taught you? Always be aware of your surroundings, whether you're hunting or not. When you're all distracted, an enemy or a corpse could attack you at any time.” The Lan disciples duck their heads, ashamed to be caught gossiping and for not minding their surroundings. Wei Wuxian softly lectures them and the disciples listen carefully. The disciples couldn't even get annoyed or angry at him because his lectures were extremely useful and they all adore him.

“Sorry, Senior Wei,” they bowed, “We will remember your words in the future,” Wei Wuxian nods and tapped each of their shoulders.

“That's good. Now go before Lan Zhan sees you all,” he said, winking at the Lan disciplines before turning his back on them and heading to the Jingshi. As they all stared at the Senior's back, the juniors' eyes gleamed. This is also one of the reasons why they all adore Senior Wei; he allows them to escape their punishments. As a result, they all ran away and returned to their respective rooms.

When Wei Wuxian opens the door to the Jingshi, Lan Wangji is already there. He approaches the table and takes a seat next to him. “Where have you gone?” Lan Wangji inquired, placing the bowls of food on the table and setting aside the tray.

“I just spoke with the juniors. I'm sorry for keeping you waiting,” Wei Wuxian sighs and rests his head on his lover's shoulder. “Lan Zhan, I need to talk to you about something after we eat.”

“Alright. Let's eat.”

Wei Wuxian immediately discussed what he had heard from the juniors after they had finished eating. Lan Wangji's brow furrowed as he listened, and similar to Wei Wuxian's thoughts, there's something missing, or rather, an information from the rumor because everything in it didn't make sense. Wei Wuxian paused for a moment to allow Lan Wangji to collect his thoughts.

“When and where did you hear about this?” He inquires, his face solemn. Since Wei Wuxian is not a snitch and is a good senior, he decides to lie.

“Remember when I was with the juniors near Yunping City a few days ago? I heard some town people talking about it, and I'm not sure if the rumour is true.” However, this was true. He and the juniors really did go to Yunping City for a night hunt, but they did not come across any civilians talking the said rumor. He assumed the rumor arose days after they left. Lan Wangji's gaze drops to his lap for a second before returning to his eyes.

“You want to go to the Burial Mounds,” he says flatly, not as a question.

“Yes,” he says, looking out the window. He gets goosebumps thinking about returning to Yiling and the Burial Mounds. He really doesn't want to go back there and bring both old and new nightmares with him back to Gusu. Lan Wangji becomes aware of this and places his hand on top of Wei Wuxian's.

“You don't have to go there alone; I'll accompany you,” he says softly, and Wei Wuxian returns his gaze back to his lover's eyes. He wishes he could bring him, but realizes he can't.

“Lan Zhan, you're the Chief Cultivator. You have duties. You're more needed here than I am.”

“No, I'll accompany you. Uncle can handle the sect for a day without me.”

“Lan Zhan, don't be a stubborn man and listen to—” A knock interrupted their conversation. Lan Wangji gets to his feet and looks out the door to see who has come to see them. When he opens the door, he sees Sizhui and Lan Wangji's expression softened.

“Is there a problem, A-Yuan?” He inquires, and Sizhui fishes something from inside his robes. Wei Wuxian decided to stand up and join Lan Wangji in order to see what Sizhui had brought them.

A white envelope with a wax seal of a red rose.

“Someone left a note at the entrance to Cloud Recesses, it's addressed to both Hanguang-jun and Senior Wei,” Sizhui says, flipping the envelope. The names Wei Wuxian and Lan Wangji were written in calligraphy in a clean and beautiful manner. It also had a pleasant smell.

“Is someone specifically requesting assistance from both of us?” Wei Wuxian inquired, raising a bow.

“Senior Wei, Hanguang-jun, you are not the only one with a note,” Sizhui pulls out another white envelope similar to theirs. “Everyone in the sect got something like this.”

Wei Wuxian frowned, “This is suspicious.” He is certain that someone is causing trouble, beginning with the rumors from Yiling. Lan Wangji responded with a small *'Mn.'*

“All right, let's read this aloud.”

When Sizhui and Lan Wangji open the envelope, they find an empty paper with no writings or spells. As a result, the three frowned. This did not sit well with them, especially Lan Wangji. Was someone playing with them? Was someone spying on them? What is going on?

Wei Wuxian noticed a subtle shift in emotion in his lover's face. His hand reached out and tightly gripped Lan Wangji's arms, jolting him out of his reverie. As they were about to throw the letter, the empty paper shines brightly, blinding the three. This happened not only to the Gusu Lan Sect, but also to other Sects. Every cultivator who received a letter began to wobble dizzily.

“L-Lan Zhan..”

“Wei…Ying…”

“A-A-Yuan…”

And everything went dark.

All cultivators opened their eyes as they regained consciousness, and sat up slowly from the cold floor. Lan Xichen was the first to recover from dizziness.

“What am I doing here? Where are we?” He remembered a disciple leaving a note on his room's door and leaving. He didn't want to get it. He didn't want to stand up to get it. It felt like it took a lot of energy to move, but he decides to get it, thinking it might be from his brother or anyone who wishes him well, but when he opened it, he was suddenly surrounded by a blinding light, got dizzy, and blacked out. And now he found himself in an unknown temple with a swarm of cultivators.

“Wait, where the fuck am I?” Jiang Wanyin cursed, clutching his head.

Lan Xichen sighs, “Sect Leader Jiang, don't curse.”

Startled by his presence, Jiang Wanyin stares at him in disbelief and exclaims, “What the fuck are you doing here?! You were in seclusion!”

Amused, Lan Xichen smiles, “I could say the same thing to you, Sect Leader Jiang.”

“Arghhh! Get away from me, young mistress!” Jingyi yells, trying to stand up and pushing Jin Ling away.

But he was also pushed by Jing Ling. “No! You get away from me! And stop calling me young Mistress!”

“Then don't act like one!" Jinyi retorts. “And don't push me!”

“Guys,” Ouyang Zizhen sighs, while Sizhui closes his eyes and sighs tiredly.

“Quiet!” Lan Qiren yells, glaring at Jingyi and Jin Ling, forcing them to shut their mouths. Lan Wangji extends his hand to help Wei Wuxian in standing. The other cultivators then begin to whisper loudly when they saw them, but one foolish yet brave cultivator decided to walk towards Wei Wuxian and point accusingly at him. The juniors and Lan Wangji blocked Wei Wuxian from the man.

“You! You trapped us all in here!" The man scowled and one disciple holds him back, fearful that his master will be killed here right away. The cold and dangerous glare from Lan Wangji gives them the impression of *'get close and you'll lose your arm later.'* The man unconsciously steps back, shuddering under the Chief Cultivator's glare. He realizes he does not want to end up like Jin Guangyao.

Wei Wuxian smirks, “How can you say that? I've been brought here as well,” he said mischievously, but the cultivators could see in his eyes that he was not amused by his accusation. Sizhui then steps in.

“Do not accuse others without proof,” Sizhui warns the cultivator sternly. Even Jiang Wanyin and Jin Ling were glaring at the cultivator. Many were becoming uneasy. Lan Qiren didn't even chastise Sizhui for the way he spoke. Despite his dislike for Wei Wuxian and his cultivation, he adheres to his sect's rules.

“Now, now, everyone, calm down—” Their heads immediately snapped to Nie Huaisang's direction. He shuddered at the sudden attention and decided to cover his face with his fan and close his mouth. Why had even he bothered? No one will listen to him!

Wei Wuxian sighs, “All right, don't block me; I can handle myself,” he pushes them all aside in order to get closer to the cultivator who accused him. Lan Wangji and the juniors stayed close by his side, ready to strike if this unknown cultivator attacks. “How come you think I brought you all here? Not even I have the power to gather almost all cultivators in one place,” he says, tilting his head to the side. He wants to laugh, feeling upset and disgust at the same time. The cultivation world really expects the worst of him.

“Y-You cultivate resentful energy, who knows what power—”

Lan Wangji's expression immediately darkens. “Do not jump to an unfolded conclusion,” he chastises, gripping the hilt of Bichen. Even after three months of his lover's name being cleared, the cultivation world still refuses to accept him and his cultivation. They have no right to judge him! If only they knew, if only they knew how much pain, struggle, and sacrifice his lover went through. They have no right, they—... Wei Wuxian places his hand on top of his and Lan Wangji slowly relaxes his grip. He turns to face Wei Wuxian, who shakes his head.

“Enough. You've all gotten letters, right?” Wei Wuxian inquires, and they all reluctantly nod. “Good, both me and Hanguang-jun got one, so obviously you can't blame me. Even I have no idea why I end up here.”

Sizhui nods at them, confirming what his Xian-gege said.

“You really think we would believe—”

“Oh, shut up!” Jingyi yells, and they all flinched. This Lan is without a doubt the most un-lan Lan. Lan Xichen's lips quirk up, while Qiren wanted to scold him, but then again, what's the point? The kid's a rebel, similar to Wei Wuxian, that he gives up and sighs in frustration. “Sizhui confirmed it for you! You think he lies?!” He scowled, and Ouyang Zizhen tries to stopped him, placing his hand in his shoulders.

“Master Wei,” said a voice. All of them turn around to see Wen Ning hiding in a pillar.

“Uncle Ning?!”

“Wen Ning?”

The corpse steps out of the pillar with a shy nod, and half of the cultivators sheathe their swords and point them at the Ghost General.

“W-What’s the Ghost General doing in here?!”

“Did he get a letter as well?”

“That's impossible! Why would anyone give him a letter?! He's a fucking dangerous fierce corpse!”

“That does not matter, he and Yiling Patriarch are here, they trapped us here!”

Gritting his teeth, Wei Wuxian exclaimed, “I told you I am not responsible for this!” For a split second, his eyes flashed red, his patience and control slipping through his fingers. God, he's so tired of hearing nonsense from these annoying cultivators; he's really tired of people not believing him; he doesn't want to get angry because it worsens his temper; he wants to go home. They all took a step back, except for those who trusted Wei Wuxian would not harm them. Wei Wuxian rarely gets angry like this, and the juniors were nervous and excited. The Yiling Patriarch was rumored before to be a cruel cultivator, bringing chaos and blood in his hands. They badly want to see it now.

Lan Xichen decided to take a step up and handle this matter himself. “Put your swords down and let's find a way out.” He joins Lan Wangji.

“Brother,” Lan Wangji greeted politely.

“Wangji, are you well?” He smiles, but not entirely.

“Yes.” Such a brief response, but it held thousands of emotion. Lan Xichen can sense and see his brother's happiness just by having Wei Wuxian by his side. He is glad to see his little brother like this. Lan Xichen then turns his gaze to Wei Wuxian.

“Wei Wuxian.”

“Zewu-jun, it's nice to see you again.” Wei Wuxian bows and offers a smile. Lan Xichen returns his bow.

“You, as well.” Then he looks around the temple. The temple appears to have been constructed recently. Not only that, but there is a massive statue in the temple's center. It looked like the dancing goddess from Dafan Mountain, but at the same time it is not. Wei Wuxian then approached Wen Ning to inquire about something.

“Were you brought here first?”

Wen Ning nods, “When I opened a letter from a lady, I blacked out and was brought here. I-I attempted to leave, but it appears that there is a barrier preventing me from doing so.” He says and puts a hand on the door, then there’s a ripple effect. Now they can see a golden barrier surrounding the temple. For a moment, no one moved, but Zidian sparked, causing all cultivators to look at Jiang Wanyin, terrified of what he’s gonna do.

“Jiang Cheng, no!” Wei Wuxian warns, but he ignored him. Instead, he charges forward as Zidian extends. Zidian is a powerful spiritual tool, powerful to even kill a cultivator and destroy a barrier. He whipped the barrier several times, but it had no effect on the barrier. This only resulted to multiple ripple effect, and before Jiang Wanyin could retreat, the barrier pushed him away, slamming him into a pillar.

“Jiang Cheng!” Wei Wuxian exclaimed.

“Jiujiu!”

Wei Wuxian and Jin Ling rushed over to his side. Jin Ling's hands began shaking, he wanted to punch his uncle for his reckless behavior. What if the barrier had done more than just push him away? He's already lost his other uncle, he can't afford to lose another. Wei Wuxian, on the other hand, smacked Jiang Wanyin’s shoulder, his brow furrowed in concern.

“Idiot! Don’t just attack if you don’t know what the barrier can do!”

Jiang Wanyin scowled and gets up. “No one acted so I did it myself! I am not even that hurt! Now get away from me!” He removes Wei Wuxian’s arm that was supporting him at his back and Jin Ling’s hand that was gripping his arm. Wei Wuxian sighed, feeling dejected and hurt, and Jiang Wanyin felt guilty but did nothing than ignore him.

Lan Xichen observes the barrier, “This barrier is made from spiritual energy. More importantly, this barrier is twice stronger than the majority of our barriers. This can only be

done by a cultivator with a high level of cultivation.” He said and the juniors grinned smugly at the cultivator who accused their Senior Wei. The cultivator scowled and turned away from them. Nie Huaisang takes a step forward, his fan covering half of his face as he observes the barrier as well.

“Xichen-ge, you say this barrier is done by a high-level cultivator, correct?” When Nie Huaisang turns to face him, Lan Xichen flinches. He's still uncomfortable around him after the events at Guanyin Temple and after he tricked him into drawing his sword to Jin Guangyao. The sad thing was that he couldn't even be angry at Nie Huaisang because he was his sworn brother's brother. If he did end up directing all of his rage and sadness at Nie Huaisang, he can picture Nie Mingjue frowning at him in disappointment, and he does not want that.

“Yes,” he responded.

“Then the person who gave us letters and transported us here is the same person,” Nie Huaisang concludes. To the side, Wei Wuxian nods in agreement. He had been paying attention to both of them. The crowd then considers this, but who is this high-level cultivator who brought them all here, and what is their goal?

“Do you believe Nie Huaisang did this? You know, contacting that cultivator to do this?” Wei Wuxian whispers into Lan Wangji's ears, but Lan Wangji does not respond. In any case, he didn't expect his lover to respond. Lan Wangji was uncertain, and it's against the rules to make assumptions. Then, they all shuddered as a surge of spiritual energy engulfed the temple, like fire burning them and the temple. Wei Wuxian wobbled, and Lan Wangji caught him around the waist, preventing him from falling. Mo Xuanyu's golden core is still weak within him, and right now, this burst of spiritual energy is overwhelming him.

Then, in front of the statue, a person appeared. A lady dressed in white robes that appear to be mourning robes. Her hair is white as snow, and she is glowing in this not-so-dark temple. All cultivators fell silent and stared at this unknown lady. They recognize her as the source of the burst of spiritual energy. The lady then turns her head slightly, revealing half of her face.

Lan Xichen politely asked, “Could you please tell us who you are and what we are doing here, Miss....?”

The lady completes her turn. They can now see her entire face, which displayed a cold and stern expression similar to Lan Wangji's. The lady does not respond to Lan Xichen, but instead, her gaze was directed to Wei Wuxian.

“You created a Time-Travel Talisman,” she declares softly, and the cultivators looked at Wei Wuxian incredulously. Master of the Six Arts, Grandmaster of demonic cultivation, a brilliant inventor, and now he's researching time travel? What could this person possibly not do? (Not to be a sacrificial idiot.)

Lan Wangji and the juniors did not hide their admiration and pride for Wei Wuxian. Lan Qiren wanted to say, *'Do not be too proud,'* but he didn't say anything and let them be. Wei Wuxian was about to ask how she knew but she interrupted him.

“May I see the Time-Travel talisman?” She inquired.

“Why?” He squints his eyes a little, suspicious all of a sudden, and the lady huffs, which could've been a laugh.

“I'm just curious. I'm not going to do anything.”

Wei Wuxian looks at her for a moment. Despite the fact that this lady is powerful, he sensed no malice or resentment from her. She is as serene as his lover. He then pulls out the talisman from his sleeves and hands it to her. She tilts her head to inspect the the talisman, turning and tilting it in the process. Suddenly, he felt as if he was showing his mother his drawing in order to receive praise or something. It was quite embarrassing. He waited for criticism, but it never came. The talisman, on the other hand, hovers in front of her and shines brightly.

Wei Wuxian was startled, “Wait a minute!”

“I made some adjustments, nothing's going to happen.”

Wei Wuxian gaped, “What do you mean you made adjustments?!”

It was a Time-Travel Talisman, and tinkering with it could have effects or even consequences, but this lady appears to know what she's doing.

“Retrieving tools from the past? What if we change it just for today?”

The talisman shines brightly as it floats to her side. In an instant, a massive array materialized. An array of unidentified writings. This piqued Wei Wuxian's interest. The cultivators began murmuring, sensing a huge amount of spiritual energy in the array. Moments later, two people emerged from the array. When Wei Wuxian and Jiang Wanyin recognized the two people, they froze. It was a man in golden robes with a vermillion mark on his forehead and a woman in purple robes with kind eyes and sweet smile.

“S-Shijie..?”

“J-Jin Zixuan..?”

All of the juniors turned to Jin Ling in shock and concern. Jin Ling remained still, his breath caught in his throat as he stared at the two people he only saw in portraits.

“A-Xian, A-Cheng,” she calls, smiling and spreading her arms. Lan Wangji lets go of Wei Wuxian's waist as he and Jiang Wanyin rushed towards her. They both hugged her tightly, tears streaming down their cheeks as they sobbed loudly. The cultivators had never seen Sect Leader Jiang and the Yiling Patriarch cry so hard, it was weird. Some of them had their jaws dropped, while others emphasized them so as not to disturb them.

“I'm sorry, I'm so sorry, S-Shijie! It was all my fault, my fault, my fault, my fault, my fault, my fault, my fault, my fault, my fault, my fault!” Wei Wuxian continued sobbing loudly, apologizing and blaming himself. Lan Wangji and the juniors' hearts ached for Wei Wuxian that they like crying too.

Wei Wuxian, so kind, caring, and forgiving. Just what had happened in the past for him to cry so hard like this?

Jin Ling is well aware that tears are welling up in his eyes. Jingyi, Sizhui, and Ouyang Zizhen stayed close to him to offer a bit of comfort, which irritated but also pleased Jin Ling. Meanwhile Jiang Wanyin wished to silence his shixiong. Stop him from apologizing because he knew, he knew, from the beginning that his sister's death was not his fault, that everything was not his fault, but as a prideful person, Jiang Cheng sobbed and said nothing.

“It wasn't your fault at all, A-Xian. In fact, it was mine. I'm sorry,” she says quietly into both of her brothers' ears and caressed their heads gently.

“No, it was—”

“A-Xian,” Jiang Yanli scolds sternly, forcing Wei Wuxian to shut up. Jiang Yanli broke the hug after a minute of crying and hugging just to look at her brothers. “You've both grown up so well,” she caressed both of their cheeks, and her brothers leaned into her hand, but then her gaze was drawn to Wei Wuxian, and her smile faded.

“Why is your appearance different, A-Xian?” She asks, worry evident in her voice. Jiang Cheng avoided her gaze while Wei Wuxian scratched his nape.

“It’s a long story Shijie.” Avoiding the topic, Wei Wuxian sniffs and turns to Jin Zixuan. He attempts to open his mouth to apologize to him as well, but then he shakes his head.

“Don’t. Like A-Li said, it was not your fault.” Wei Wuxian had no choice but to look down. He was responsible for their deaths, he killed these two, leaving A-Ling orphaned and bullied by others for not having his parents by his side; where did he get the audacity to be this close to these two? It hurt a lot. He still wanted to hug his Shijie but didn't. He's disgusted with himself.

Jiang Wanyin calls out, “A-Ling, come here.” Jiang Yanli and Jin Zixuan's eyes widened. Jin Ling was gently pushed forward by the juniors, who smiled encouragingly at him. Regaining his composure, he walk towards Jiang Wanyin’s side and Jiang Yanli begins to cry. Jin Zixuan, on the other hand, was still staring at his son in disbelief. He couldn't believe his son is in front of him right now. His son that looks so much like him, but got Yanli's kind eyes. His son was now a strong and grown up man.

Jin Zixuan smiled and said, “A-Ling, come and hug us.”

Jin Ling did not hesitate and hug both of his parents. Wei Wuxian steps back, shame eating him. Lan Wangji comes to his side and slid his arm to his lover’s waist, comforting him. Wei Wuxian leans in his lover's shoulders, still feeling tears forming in his eyes.

“Lan Zhan, I took this away from him.” His voice cracked. Lan Wangji’s hand in his waist tightened as he shakes his head. He looks down and planted a kiss on Wei Wuxian’s forehead.

“It was not your fault, Wei Ying.”

Then another group of people emerged from the array. It was The Sect Leader Nie, Nie Mingjue, The Jiang Matriarch and Patriarch, Yu Ziyuan and Jiang Fengmian, The Lan Sect Leader, Qingheng-jun and his wife, Madam Lan, The Wen Clan's Doctor, Wen Qing, and finally, The Jin Sect Matriarch, Madam Jin.

All of the cultivators in the room were in a frenzy. They couldn't believe what they were seeing. Why are those who died in the past are here with them? Why are they alive, and why don't they resemble The Ghost General?

All of the families of those who emerged from the array rushed up to them, crying and hugging them tightly. Witnessing this, Wei Wuxian wanted to weep and hide somewhere where no one could find him. Most of these people died because of him, it was all his fault. Why is he here in the first place? To make him feel even more guilty and sorry than he already is?

Lan Wangji's hand slipped from his waist. He looks up to see his lover staring at his parents. From his point of view, his lover looks like a child gazing innocently at a toy he desires. From the side, he can see Lan Xichen and Lan Qiren's reaction were the same as Lan Wangji's.

“Go,” Wei Wuxian says with an encouraging smile. The three Lans proceeds to Qingheng-jun and Madam Lan. Lan Wangji and Lan Xichen were quickly embraced by their mother, while Qingheng-jun smiled. Lan Wangji, who disliked physical touch, melted into the hug as tears streamed down his cheeks. He did not weep like Wei Wuxian, but it was still heart-breaking. The Lan juniors are taken aback when they see the Twin Jades' parents. Madam Lan was said to be beautiful, and Qingheng-jun was said to be very attractive, and they can now confirm this.

Seeing his lover with his parents, Wei Wuxian's heart skipped a beat. They looked contented and happy, especially his husband. He decides to give the family some space and turns to Wen Qing, who was conversing with Wen Ning and Sizhui while smiling softly. The three then turned to look at him, and Wei Wuxian felt like crying again.

Wen Qing smiles, “You won't even greet me, Wei Wuxian?”

Wei Wuxian immediately rushes up to her and tightly embraces her.

“I’m sorry, I'm so sorry,” He sobs, burying his face in her shoulders.

“Don't be. I'm glad you're happy now,” she said, breaking the hug and glances at Lan Wangji. Wei Wuxian notices this and lets out a light laugh, “He's too good for me Qing-jie, I don't deserve him.”

She raises her brow, annoyed at Wei Wuxian's self-deprecation. “Did I not make myself clear?”

“Well, yes...”

“A-Xian,” another voice called out. Wei Wuxian turns his attention to Jiang Fengmian and Yu Ziyuan. Jiang Fengmian smiled, while Yu Ziyuan scoffed and averted her gaze. “Come here.” The Jiang Patriarch said.

He didn't want to stand next to them yet, but he didn't have a choice. He also misses them and wishes to speak with them. He walks towards them, nervousness creeping in. He bowed his head and cupped his hands in front of them.

“Jiang-zongzhu, Yu-furen,” he greets politely.

“A-Xian, you have a different appearance. What happened?” Jiang Fengmian asked with a frown.

“I'm not surprised at all. You died and took someone else's body? Are you that low, Wei Wuxian?!” Yu Ziyuan seethes. If she had Zidian right now, he knows he'd be whipped until he cannot stand. This isn't even his fault; he was forced in this body against his will.

Yu Ziyuan despises him, even before and after death, and even after being resurrected. That's to be expected; he causes trouble wherever he goes.

“San-niang, you—”

“That's not exactly what happened, Mother,” Jiang Wanyin says flatly. Wei Wuxian turns to his brother with a sharp glare, warning him not to say anything.

“Jiang Cheng—”

Irritated, he exclaims, “Shut up!”

“Calm down, Mother. A-Xian will explain everything to us,” Yanli reassures, clutching Wei Wuxian's hand. Yu Ziyuan scoffed again.

“He better!” She said venomously.

“There are only two people left,” said the lady in white. Unbeknownst to the cultivators, she fires a glare at Yu Ziyuan, likely enough to intimidate a ferocious man and woman. Then two people emerged from the array, and that’s when all of the cultivators’ jaws dropped. They know these two people even if they were rogue cultivators.

“C-Cangse Sanren..?”

“W-Wei Changze..?”

Wei Wuxian froze. Other than that memory of his mother riding a donkey while he was on his father's shoulder, and the two of them laughing at something his mother said, he had no other memories of his parents. That was all he could recall.

“Where are we?” That was the first thing Cangse Sanren said. She and Wei Changze looked around and noticed a swarm of cultivators staring at them as if they'd grown another head.

Wei Changze frowned and inquired, “Why are we here?”

His wife shrugs, crossing her arms and said, “I don't know.” Looking around, they both then noticed Lan Qiren and Jiang Fengmian. Cangse Sanren's eyes twinkled with delight.

“Lan Qiren, Lan Qiren! You're still growing your beard?” She strides to his direction enthusiastically and winked at him. Lan Qiren felt all his hair stand. He badly wants to get out of here, away from her. Like right now.

“Stay away from me.” He hissed and she laughs.

“Don’t be like that, we’re friends!”

The juniors were mortified. She and their Senior Wei were so alike!

He grits his teeth and says, “We. Are. Not.”

The juniors suppressed their laughter, fearful of being chastised by Lan Qiren again. This feels like Wei Wuxian and Hanguang-jun all over again.

Wei Changze smiled and gave a quick bow to his friend and his wife. He greets, “Jiang-zongzhu, Yu-furen.”

The Jiang Matriarch and Patriarch, still in disbelief, returns the bow. Yu Ziyuan glances at Cangse Sanren for a second. This woman, the woman Jiang Fengmian was infatuated with before, is in front of her now, alive and smiling as if she had not experienced any hardships and death. Yu Ziyuan's heart is brimming with rage and jealousy. She wants her out of her, away from his husband. But before anyone else could see how her expression darkened, she schooled her face. Maybe she can request to the lady in white to remove her here later.

Wei Changze and Cangse Sanren smiles seeing Jiang Yanli and Jiang Wanyin.

“Are these your children, Fengmian? They’ve grown up so well.” Yanli and Jiang Wanyin politely bows. Jiang Wanyin fixed his gaze on his shixiong's parents. Just like what Wei Wuxian felt when he saw his parents again, he felt guilty and ashamed. How will he explain to them that he led the siege at the Burial Mounds? How will he explain the fact that their son gave up his golden core for him and was forced to practice resentful energy? How will he explain to them that he blamed their son for everything, despite the fact that he was not to blame? Above all, how will he explain that he tried to kill their son? How? How?

Wei Wuxian still didn't say anything, his gaze fixed on his parents. When Cangse Sanren's gaze fell on him, he felt tears well up in his eyes.

“Who is he?” She inquires of Fengmian. The Jiangs' gaze turned to Wei Wuxian. “Are you A-Cheng’s friend?” Wei Changze asked, a warm smile formed on his lips which brings warmth to Wei Wuxian’s heart. He felt dizzy, his heart is pounding so loud that anyone could hear it. That was it; he couldn't take it any longer, it's all too much. Tears streamed down his cheeks as he choked a sob. Cangse Sanren and Wei Changze's eyes widened in horror. Did they do something? Did they scare him? What did they do?

“A-Are you alright? We’re—” Wei Changze had barely finished his apology when he was tackled into a hug by Wei Wuxian. He and Cangse Sanren exchanged puzzled looks as they tried to figure out what was going on.

“A-A-Ying..” Wei Wuxian murmurs. Wei Changze and Cangse Sanren froze. How did this person know what their son's name was? Unless…

“A-Are you our A-Ying?” Cangse Sanren's voice trembled. Her and Wei Changze's hearts were racing so fast. Their bodies were shaking. The hope they had long buried resurfaced. The last thing they remembered before passing away was leaving their son in an inn to go on a night hunt, but the one hugging them right now is their son, alive and well. Wei Wuxian's lips form a small smile as he nods and responds with a small *'Mn.'*

Wei Changze and Cangse Sanren cried, happiness and relief washed over them as they tightly hugged their son. Lan Wangji and the juniors were happy and delighted for him. Jin Ling felt happy for him too, though concealed it with a scowl akin to Jiang Wanyin's. To be reunited with his parents, Wei Wuxian’s couldn’t ask for more.

“Enough of this! Just what are you playing at, Wei Wuxian?!” Another unknown cultivator yelled angrily, causing Wei Changze and Cangse Sanren to glare at her for interfering with their reunion. “And you!” She points to the lady in white who has been silently watching them. “Who are you?! Are you Wei Wuxian’s companion?!” She yells loudly.

It was really brave of her to yell at a High-level Cultivator.

An elderly man then decides to join, “Clearly, they are! They've trapped us here in order to kill us all!”

And the yelling continued.

While the two unknown cultivators were at it, they couldn't help but notice Cangse Sanren's face contorted in horror. She should’ve look at the lady in white with that expression, but no.

Instead, her gaze was pointed at the unknown cultivators, as if she was terrified for them. Why was she reacting like this? They all thought.

“What do you and Wei Wuxian want from us, huh?” shouted the unknown cultivator. “Answer us! Did you bring us here to kill us all?”

Cangse Sanren paled even more as the unknown cultivators drew their sword and pointed it at the lady in white.

The lady in white sighs, “This is why I despise interacting with cultivators.” Her gaze falls on Cangse Sanren. Cangse Sanren quickly let go of his son and walked over to her. The cultivators carefully watched her approach the lady. She then comes to a halt in front of her and drops on her knees.

“Cangse!”

“Mother!”

All of the cultivators just don’t know what’s going on anymore. They will just have to wait for someone to explain what the fuck is going on. Cangse Sanren bows until her forehead touched the cold floor. Pale blue eyes stared down at her. When Cangse Sanren rises and looks up, the lady in white’s lips quirk up a little.

“Grandmaster,” She whispers, but she was heard by all the cultivators.

Grandmaster, she said. Cangse Sanren’s grandmaster is the immortal. Immortal… There’s only one immortal in the cultivation world. Their eyes widened in horror.

Baoshan Sanren..

“No way!”

“Oh my god..”

“Is this for real?”

Murmurs filled the entire temple. The cultivators, especially Jiang Wanyin stared incredulously at her. Before, Wei Wuxian had lied to him about going up to the mountain in Yiling to seek the immortal's help in recovering his core. After knowing the truth, he refused to believe the immortal's existence. He didn't care if she was real or not. He will never meet the Grandmaster of his shixiong's mother. And yet she is right in front of them now, beautiful and untouchable. Powerful and dangerous.

“Stand up.” She commands and Cangse Sanren rises to her feet. The immortal's gaze then is drawn to the swarm of cultivators who were both awed and intimidated by her.

Jin Zixuan and Madam Jin were the first to bow to the immortal to pay respect, and they were quickly followed by everyone else. The unknown cultivators who pointed their sword at the immortal, however, were hesitant to bow their heads. The juniors, on the other hand, had their jaws dropped. They felt giddy all of a sudden. This is the first time they have seen the immortal in person. One of the juniors' favourite stories was about her attaining immortality, but there were also rumours claiming that the existence of the immortal was not real and was only used to humour young children.

“I did not have any contact with anyone outside this mountain, but over the years, I've kept track of everything that's going on in the cultivation world. Through a crystal ball, I saw war, bloodshed, betrayal, pain, and sacrifices,” Her eyes went to Wei Wuxian. “You, son of Cangse Sanren, had suffered the most throughout these years, yet no one saw or appreciated the sacrifices you made. I respect you for that, Wei Wuxian.” She gaves him a smile and Wei Wuxian could only look down. She was wrong. There was nothing to respect anything about him. He did not try hard enough to keep the people he cared for safe in the past, they still died because of him.

“I sent you all a letter as an invitation to enter my mountain, for now.” She says and turns her back on them. The cultivators suddenly looks around, feeling anxious. So they were now at the Immortal's legendary Celestial Mountain, the stories were true after all. Their hearts pounded loudly. They really need the get out of here, but the problem is, what can they do to

get out of here? They were teleported here against their will, and only the Immortal can undo the barrier. What could the immortal want from them to even go as far as to do this and bringing the dead in the past to the present time?

“Grandmaster, what are we really doing here?” Cangse Sanren asked.

Baoshan Sanren hand shines brightly and in front of them, a huge screen appeared. “What exactly are you all doing here? To witness what the cultivation world did to a benevolent man. To uncover the mistreatment and corruption by those in positions of power that led to the young man's tragic end without his story being heard.” Her venomous tone sends shivers down their spines. They suspect that the person she's referring to is Wei Wuxian, and Wei Wuxian is aware of this too, but the question is, why is the Immortal doing this? What benefit will he or she gain in the end? What will they gain from watching Wei Wuxian's disgusting and painful memories?

In the corner of Wei Wuxian’s eye, he can see his lover’s expression contorted into worry.

Wei Wuxian sighs tiredly, “There's no need to do this.” He genuinely appreciated the immortal's efforts, but what the cultivation world thinks of him will not and never will change, and besides, he can’t let the immortal expose his pain and struggles in front of everyone; he won't need their pity.

“I want to see,” Jin Ling says, startling Wei Wuxian and Jiang Wanyin. “I want to see what happened before my parents died.”

“No way! You can’t witness that! And behave yourself or I’ll break your legs!”

“Jiujiu, I just wanna know what happened, please.” He pleads. Jin Ling had long forgiven Wei Wuxian. He is now aware that he is not to blame for his parents' deaths, and yet Wei Wuxian was there in their final moments. He wants to see everything even if it will hurt him. Jin Zixuan, Wei Wuxian, and the Jiang siblings exchange glances. Yanli then places her hand on his son's shoulders.

“A-Ling, are you capable of handling everything? Everything that had happened before had been cruel and bloody; it could be overwhelming and terrifying for you and the rest of the disciples.” She caresses his son's cheeks, her face worried, but Jin Ling reluctantly shakes his head.

Hiding his fear, he scoffed and crossed his arms and said, “Nothing I can’t handle.” The Jiang Patriarch huffs in amusement. He sees a lot of Jiang Cheng in his grandson. Yu Ziyuan's lingers more to Jin Ling's back, pleased with how his grandson grown up to be a strong boy even though he looks like a brat.

“You sure about that brat? Last time when we were at Yi city, you and Jingyi almost peed in your pants when A-Qing entered the house.” Wei Wuxian wiggles his eyebrows and smirks, trying to ease the tension forming inside of him. The cheeks of Jingyi and Jin Ling flush brightly.

“There was no need to bring it up! And I wasn't afraid; I was just...startled.” He hid his embarrassment behind a forced scowl. Lan Xichen and Jin Zixuan nearly laughed.

“Yeah? You and Jin Ling literally hugged each other to dea—”

“Are you really going to embarrass us in front of so many people, Wei Wuxian?!” Wei Wuxian laughed as Jin Ling glared at him. At the very least, he's no longer sad. Jin Ling had been watching him silently and for some reason, he hated seeing his sad expression. He was accustomed to seeing him smile and laugh all the time. He was born to smile, so he should continue to smile!

“No, no, I’ll stop!”

“Immortal, are you really going so far as to prove Wei Wuxian's innocence to us? Ha! That is not going to work! His reputation is already blacker than night!” A brave soul roared again. As half of the cultivators sent him a death stare, the immortal sighed once more. If the immortal snaps at them, it will be his fault they die here.

“In case you forgot, his name has already been cleared. More importantly, don't broach the subject of reputation if you don't have one.” A harsh and sharp voice responded to the unknown cultivator. At the back of the crowd was Luo Qingyang, or Mianmian, dressed in dark robes and a sword in her hand. The cultivators who have known Luo Qingyang smiled, especially Jin Zixuan. He is relieved to see his bestfriend again and Mianmian reciprocates the feeling.

When Wei Wuxian saw her, he grins and waved, pleased by her presence. Though Wei Wuxian has his back to Lan Wangji, he smirks inwardly, knowing Lan Wangji might be feeling jealous, again. His lover is really prone to jealousy, he can’t help but coo. His lover is very adorable even if Jiang Cheng does not think so.

“Mianmian!” He calls.

The corners of her lips twitched as she walks forward. She cupped her hands and bowed. “Hello, Wei Wuxian, Jin Zixuan, and Madam Jin.” She greets.

“It's great to see you again,” Zixuan says as she and Madam Jin approach her.

“Yes, I feel the same.”

“Why aren't you wearing our sect's robes, Luo Qingyang?” Madam Jin wonders. She had a sneaking suspicion she had defected from their sect.

“I left a long time ago.” And of course her suspicion was right. “If Madam Jin agrees, I'll explain why later." She bows once more.

Madam Jin nodded, waving her off. “Alright.”

The unknown cultivator clenches his teeth in anger and embarrassment and was about to say more when he was cut off by Baoshan Sanren.

“There's nothing to prove. You will pass judgment based on what you see and inform me of your thoughts. Furthermore,” Baoshan Sanren turns to face them all again, and they trembled in fear when her eyes flashed gold. “I'll let you all see why I despise the cultivation world.” She turns to face the screen and raised her hand, infusing spiritual energy into it. “Shall we begin?”

Once again, the massive screen shines brightly. Cangse Sanren and Wei Changze were on the screen, with little A-Ying in his mother's lap.

“A-Ying, you must remember what others do for you, not what you do to others. Only when people don't carry so much in their hearts will they feel truly free.” Cangse Sanren smiles and wipes the food on the corner of Wei Wuxian’s lips.

Jiang Fengmian and Lan Qiren jolted. The immortal purposefully chose this as the first scene for them to see. This was one of the phrases they remembered from Cangse Sanren, and it had been imprinted in their minds ever since she and Changze were killed in a night hunt. Lan Wangji recalls Wei Wuxian mentioning this as well.

“Yes, mother,” Wei Wuxian replied, his gaze drawn to the food on the table. He clearly desires another bite of the meat. Wei Changze noticed this and grabbed a spoon to feed him.

“You've been eating since earlier; are you still hungry, A-Ying?” With his son's big smile and crinkled eyes, Wei Changze looks fondly at him as he eats.

“No! Want more, I’m hungry!” And Wei Wuxian uses his only weapon so his parents would give in, he *pouts*. Changze and Cangse Sanren chuckled.

“Alright, you can eat more.”

Lan Wangji approached Wei Wuxian's side, but not before bowing to his parents. Wei Wuxian is aware that his lover is now beside him, but he did not take his gaze away from the screen.

He has no recollection of this; only his mother's words have stayed with him. He wondered if the memories he had forgotten would also be revealed.

Cangse and Changze leaned on each other, their heads bowed. This was also the day they left their A-Ying in an inn to go on a night hunt. Cangse Sanren reluctantly takes his son's hand and grips it tightly. Wei Wuxian turns to face her, a sad smile on his face.

Yu Ziyuan frowned seeing the whole interaction on the screen. She already expected Cangse Sanren and Wei Changze would lavishly love and spoil Wei Wuxian. She was enraged after Jiang Fengmian brought the child over to Lotus Pier and fought with him all night. She remembered how small, pale, thin, and filthy Wei Wuxian was in Jiang Fengmian's arms. She recalled how Wei Wuxian had been forced to listen to their argument as Jiang Fengmian refused to let him go. In his husband's arms, he trembled and cried silently. Jiang Fengmian literally begged at her to let Wei Wuxian stay in their home.

She eventually gave in in the end. She didn't have a choice because Jiang Fengmian was too stubborn, and she also thought of Wei Changze. She was acquainted with him while he was at Lotus Pier. She also recalled that as Wei Wuxian grew older, Jiang Fengmian's focus shifted to him rather than his real son, Jiang Wanyin. He lavished praise on Wei Wuxian while expressing his disappointment and disapproval to Jiang Wanyin. As a result, a rumor arose about Wei Wuxian being an illegitimate child of Jiang Fengmian to Cangse Sanren. She felt betrayed and angry. Since that rumour spread, she has been fighting with Jiang Fengmian on a regular basis, expressing her rage at his failure to acknowledge their son. Jiang Fengmian was also angry at her that he began yelling at her as well. That night, the Jiang siblings and Wei Wuxian cried silently. That night, Jiang Wanyin blamed Wei Wuxian for their parents' constant fighting and Yanli chastised him. Wei Wuxian just took all the blame and ran away.

Then, one day, Yu Ziyuan and Jiang Fengmian fought for the same reason again. Wei Wuxian is well aware of the rumors; he is the reason this family is in such mess. Despite the fact that he should be grateful to the Jiangs for providing him with shelter, food, and warm clothing, he felt suffocated staying in such a toxic household. He desperately wanted to leave, but he had nowhere to go. He was also the Jiang Sect's head disciple so he really did not have any choice but to stay.

Yu Ziyuan recalled passing by at the training ground when Wei Wuxian punched one of the disciples in the face and exclaimed,

"My parents are real people!"

She punished him with Zidian after that. Yu Ziyuan sigh and focuses on the screen once more.

A new scene appeared on the screen. Snow falling from the sky, making the surroundings all white. Then, the cultivators noticed a little boy dressed in light blue robes with a cloud pattern ribbon on its forehead, holding a rattle drum and playing with it in the unfamiliar streets around them.

“That’s you, my little A-Zhan.” Madam Lan mumbles and turns to Lan Wangji with a smile. The corner of his lips quirk up a bit. It really was good to see and feel his mother this close again.

“Hanguang-jun, look how cute you are.” Nie Huaisang turns to Lan Wangji. He can’t help but compare little Wangji and the grown up Wanji, and damn, Lan Wangji really grown up to be a very fine man. Wei-xiong is indeed very lucky. Lan Wangji ignored his comment while the juniors fussed over little Hanguang-jun.

“That’s the Chief Cultivator before?”

“He’s so small.”

“And very very cute!”

Two girl cultivators commented silently, afraid that Lan Wangji will hear them.

“Hanguang-jun is so little!”

“And so adorable!”

The disciples commented. Qingheng-jun and Madam Lan chuckled, Lan Xichen looks amused, and Lan Qiren? If he did not remember the rules, he would've coo seeing his nephew too.

"See Lan Zhan? I told you, you are very adorable." Wei Wuxian booped his lover's nose. Lan Wangji just shakes his head, but Wei Wuxian could see the redness of his ears. He decides not to comment on that.

In another scene, two straw dolls were carefully placed on a pile of snow in the back of an alley. "A-Die, A-Niang," a child's voice whispered so softly. Tiny hands appeared as the child holds another straw doll and placing it between the two straw dolls. "And... A-Ying!" the small child concluded and smiled.

Many people recognized him as soon as they saw his face, causing some cultivators to gasp in disbelief.

"S-Senior Wei?" The juniors were in such shock that they couldn't speak. This had the greatest impact on Sizhui, Jin Ling, Jingyi, and Ouyang Zizhen. Senior Wei — their cheerful and mischievous senior, lived on the streets before?

Cangse Sanren and Wei Changze were horrified. They grabbed their son and hugged him tightly as if their lives depended on it. "W-We're so sorry, A-Ying…. W-We're so sorry for leaving you.." The voice of Cangse Sanren trembled. Her heart feels like it's about to burst at any moment. It really hurts her to see his son like this, that their son went through something as horrible as this, that they couldn't be by his side as he grew up. He could've grown up in a warm home with food. Wei Changze was even worse; tears were welling up in the corners of his eyes. He chose not to speak, not trusting his voice enough at the moment.

Jiang Wanyin and Jiang Yanli looked at their brother and wanted to hug him as well, but they did not want to disrupt the family moment. Wei Wuxian was terrified the first day he stayed at Lotus Pier, especially after seeing Jiang Wanyin's puppies. As a result, the Jiang Patriarch sent the puppies away. Jiang Wanyin was furious at Wei Wuxian and upset with his father for that. Other than the puppies, Wei Wuxian feared Yu Ziyuan's rage. For this reason, he tried not to anger her, or cross paths with her, and yet she gets angry and punishes him in many ways Wei Wuxian couldn't understand. The Jiang siblings were powerless to protect their

brother from their mother's punishments. They could only provide solace. They even have to drag their brother to the healer’s room to recuperate.

Jiang Fengmian felt sad. It took him years to track down Wei Wuxian, and the first thing he sees when he found him was that he was surrounded by wolves.

Lan Wangji's heart broke into a million pieces seeing his love in this state. So pale, thin, and filthy, but right there was his smile. A smile that could solve all problems, a smile that could light up the entire world, even the darkest corners on earth. He wished he could had done something, but it was in the past and he couldn't change it. He looks at his Wei Ying. He is smiling as he is embraced by his parents, but there’s tears his cheeks. He could see how safe Wei Wuxian is in his parents' arms.

The Cultivators were at a loss for words. They could have sworn Wei Wuxian was born from the Jiang Sect, and then Wei Changze decided to secede to the Jiang Sect in order to travel around the world with Cangse Sanren. They had anticipated something, but not this. The cultivators who despised Wei Wuxian, however, did not care all about this and chose to remain silent.

Despite the fact that his smile was blinding, it faded gradually. He'd been living on the streets for a while, thriving and surviving in the hopes that his parents would return, bringing new food or toys for him. He hoped, he believed, he never gave up.

Over the years of living on the streets, his memories of his parents began to blur and fade, and he found himself sobbing quietly in a dark alley in a bustling city. Frustrated and angry at himself for not remembering the face of his Mother and Father.

Some of the cultivators pitied Wei Wuxian, while Jin Ling glanced at him. He is all too familiar with his frustration and anger. He understands the feeling that he wants to cry. Seeing how broken Wei Wuxian was as a child, and yet still managed to smile like that, it hurts—it's agonizing. Jin Ling promised to himself not treat his uncle harshly anymore. He will work hard to please him and maybe spoil him with whatever he desires.

Then, little A-Ying hears the sound of a rattle drum, and he glanced up in surprise. Little A-Zhan felt someone was staring at him, so he paused and glanced over. For a few

seconds, the pair exchanged surprised glances. They stared at each other as if both hearts were already aware of what the future held for them.

Oh..

Oh..

Wei Wuxian remembered being given a toy before, but as he grew older, he forgot the child's face. The only thing he remembered was that the child was so kind as to offer his toy for him and he was really pretty. This lovely and kind child turned out to be Lan Wangji, his husband. His heart melted, and he felt happy and giddy. His eyes shone brightly as he turned to his lover, whose expression is as surprised as the two children on the screen. God, he loves this man so much.

“T-That was you?” Wei Wuxian inquired, his voice slightly shaky, and Lan Wangji reluctantly nods.

“I was with Uncle and Brother that time. I don’t remember what we were doing at Yiling.” Lan Wangji responds. Though he had not obtained the Wei Wuxian's name before when he was a child, he remembered his baby face quite well.

“God, you both were really destined for each other!” Nie Huaisang squeals, earning a light smack in the head from Nie Mingjue.

“Don’t tease them.” He warns fondly.

“B-But look at them Da-ge! They met at such a young age! It's destiny!” Nie Huaisang argues and Madam Jin nods at him.

"I quite agree, don’t you think so, Zixuan?" She smirks and looks at his son, who has turned away from her, his cheeks pink. Jiang Yanli giggled at this while Jiang Wanyin wanted to barf.

"What is your relationship with him, A-Zhan?" Qingheng-jun inquires, despite the fact that he may already know his son's response.

“Oh, I am his—“

“Husband.” Lan Wangji concludes, his ears burning. Wei Wuxian could hear his mother and father's soft chuckles, which made his cheeks burn. “We are husbands,” Lan Wangji says as he grabs his hand, intertwines it, and raises it for all to see. The cultivators were not surprised; only those who did not know were taken aback. Some were secretly disgusted with their relationship.

“Lan Zhan, Lan Zhan!” In embarrassment, Wei Wuxian covers his face with his other hand. Madam Lan and Qingheng-jun both smile at him.

“We are glad to meet you, Wei Wuxian.”

“Thank you, Madam Lan, Qingheng-jun,” he says, bowing. Lan Wangji turned to face Wei Wuxian's parents and bowed as well. His eyes already conveying the words *‘I will take care and love your son, Wei Wuxian, until I lose my breath.’* And Cangse Sanren and Wei Changze immediately approves of him.

Lan Wangji and Wei Wuxian's parents exchanged smiles and nods. They were also acquainted in the past as they attended Cloud Recesses classes, so it is simple for them to plan another wedding for the two soon. Cangse Sanren sends another wink to Lan Qiren, who immediately shoots her with a glare. Lan Xichen covers his lips with his sleeve as he laughs.

Then, a split second later, Wei Wuxian gave the lovely child a blinding smile. Lan Wangji, enamoured with his smile, approaches Wei Wuxian and stands directly in front of him. Then, without thinking, he extended the drum to him. Wei Wuxian looked surprised at the child and at the drum. Then, with the same warm smile on his face, he slowly reached out and took it.

While others were fussing over the two lovers, Wen Qing, Wen Ning, and Sizhui frowned when they noticed a dog bite on little A-Ying's arms as he reached for the rattle drum. When Jiang Wanyin saw this, he also cursed silently. Even though he is still upset, it was really a wise decision to send his puppies away.

“So what about this? Are we supposed to pity Wei Wuxian now?” Another unidentified cultivator, annoyed at what he sees on the screen. Lan Wangji glared at him, gripping the hilt of Bichen tightly.

“I don’t need anyone’s pity.” Wei Wuxian says flatly and places his hand on top of his lover’s hand.

“Zewu-jun, the silencing spell might come in handy right now,” Jin Zixuan says to Lan Xichen. He's been silent since he arrived, observing the interactions, but he can't stand how some of these stupid cultivators try to provoke the Immortal and Wei Wuxian. What was the point of provoking them?

Jiang Wanyin concurs, saying, “Damn right.”

Lan Wangji, Lan Sizhui, Lan Jingyi, and Lan Xichen took note of Jin Zixuan’s words.

The screen flashed once more. Snow fell from the sky in Yiling. The bustling city was illuminated by golden streetlights. People were going from stall to stall looking and buying foods and other things. Some were out and about in Yiling with their friends and family.

“Fireworks are going off! Move out of the way, those from below!” A man yelled, and the temple was filled with the sounds of firecrackers.

The explosion confused and startled the cultivators. They were also perplexed by what they were seeing on the screen right now.

“What’s happening?”

“What is the immortal showing us?”

The cultivator whispers.

“Happy New Year!” Someone in the crowd shouts happily.

“Wishing everyone happiness and prosperity!”

“Best wishes! May all things go well for everyone!”

"Happy New Year!”

The excited shouts continued. People were walking here and there, shouts echoed in the streets, and the flashing lights of the firecrackers combined with the streetlights were overwhelming.

This made the cultivators dizzy, especially Lan Qiren. There was far too much going on in a single scene. How much more will there be in the next one?

The screen then shifted, focusing their attention on a child kneeling in the dirt in a dark street alley, trembling and clutching his stomach in hunger. He looks up and sees a swarm of people from afar. He then squints his eyes a bit, the bright lights blinding his sight.

When they saw Wei Wuxian, some of the cultivators began to move away from the screen. He looked quite decent in the second scene, despite being filthy, but he looks far worse in this one. He had fresh dog bite scars on his thin and bony legs.

Wei Wuxian tightened his grip on his robes. He remembered all of it, and it still haunts him. When Cangse Sanren and Wei Changze stayed close to him, Wei Wuxian sighs in relief, The parents gripped their son's hand tightly in comfort.

“Hot steam buns!” Yelled a shopkeeper. “Freshly prepared steam buns! Steam Buns! Hot and fresh steam buns! Ay! Have a look! Freshly made steam buns! Steam buns!” When the shopkeeper sees Wei Wuxian aimlessly walking around, the shopkeeper smiles.

Jiang Yanli and Wen Qing exchanged worried looks. Wei Wuxian had just emerged from the dark alley, cold, weak, and hungry. They wished they could simply enter the screen and offer him food. Lan Wangji made it a point to spoil him more when this finishes. Jiang Wanyin, however, decided he would treat Wei Wuxian better.

“Hey, young man!” The shopkeeper calls out to Wei Wuxian and waves him closer to the shop. "Say, would you like a hot steam bun?" The shopkeeper asks softly and Wei Wuxian really wants to, but he reluctantly shakes his head.

“You brat! You need food! Look at you! So pale and thin!” Wen Qing yells, and Wei Wuxian runs behind his Father's back.

“Look, I was a little embarrassed to accept okay? I don't even have anything to give back to him!” Wei Wuxian retorts. Jiang Wanyin gives him a stern look. Wei Wuxian really made a rule in his head that every offer, or gift requires a pay back.

“Listen to the doctor, Wei Wuxian,” he chastised, but with no heat. Wei Wuxian looks at his brother and gave him a teasing smile.

“Aw, Chengcheng cares about me.” He raises his palm to cover his lips.

“Shut up! And who are you calling Chengcheng, huh?!”

“Chengcheng!”

“Shut up, Wei Wuxian!”

Jiang Yanli couldn't help but giggle as she leaned into her husband's frame. A lot of things happened that caused his brothers' bond to fray, but at the end of the day, they will always be brothers. Jin Zixuan puts his hand around Yanli's waist, drawing her closer to him.

“They're noisy.” Zixuan whispered to her.

Yanli nods her head. “Yes, they're like this all the time.”

“It’s fine. I’m not hungry,” the boy responded, but his stomach grumbled. “Well, that’s-” He tried to come up with an excuse, to say something, yet he could not think of anything. He was caught lying.

“You’re not hungry?” The man asked again and laughs. “I can hear your stomach growling from here! Here, this bun will be given to you as a gift. What kind of filling do you want?” He smiles fondly at Wei Wuxian.

“R-Really?” The boy's eyes glowed with hope. He was about to say something when he sees someone, a woman, who seems to be the shopkeeper’s wife, that came out of nowhere.

“Hey!” The shopkeeper's wife interrupts. “Do you believe our family is so well-off that we can do this? Xiao Bao is starting school next year, and we haven't saved enough money yet!” The wife chastised and Wei Wuxian looks down in embarrassment. He should not have hoped to be given food for free. But he was so hungry that he just wants to give in and accept it.

Cangse Sanren and Wei Changze really regretted leaving that inn to go on a night hunt. They should not have accepted that request for assistance knowing there were cultivators nearby.

They could have been exploring the world and watched their son grow into a fine young man.

Yu Ziyuan watched the scene, silently scowling as she remembered the first week Wei Wuxian stayed at their home. She starved him for a day as the mere presence of him in her home irritated her. Wei Wuxian didn't even complain or ask for food from anyone in the house. He just stayed in his room, and of course Yanli noticed his brother was not present at the dining hall, so she brought him soup, and he was overjoyed. Tch, he really troubles Yanli to cook for him.

The disciples on the side begin to congregate and whisper something that the cultivators do not understand.

“I will definitely buy Senior Wei Emperor's Smile as many as he wants,” Jingyi declared, crossing his arms.

“Do you have enough money for that?” Sizhui asked, raising his brow.

“Of course, Young Mistress and I will split the bill.”

Jin Ling’s brow twitched. “Who says we'll split the bill? You were the one who suggested buying him Emperor's Smile as many as he wanted. Take responsibility for that.”

“You're so cruel, you don't want to buy Senior Wei Emperor's Smile?” he asked, fluttering his eyelashes, and Jin Ling nearly vomits. He did promise to himself to spoil Wei Wuxian, and Wei Wuxian loves Emperor smile. If he and Jingyi had to split the bill, he could.

“Fine,” Jin Ling sighs. “But I'll still get him something too.”

“Same here, but I'm at a loss for what to give to Senior Wei,” Ouyang Zizhen casts a glance at Sizhui. “Do you have any recommendations, Sizhui?”

“As of now, none, but I'll come up with something. Let's finish this conversation when we get out of here,” he says, to which everyone nods.

Nie Mingjue shakes his head as he heard the disciples. He, like Jin Zixuan, has remained silent on the sides. Nie Mingjue glances at Lan Xichen for a moment before averting his gaze. For now, he will stay silent until he needs to say something.

The shopkeeper's wife notices Wei Wuxian and turns to face him. “Where did this little beggar come?” She looks at Wei Wuxian once more before her face contorts in disgust. “Aiya, so filthy! Shoo! Don't get in the way of our work!”

“Oh, I'm sorry,” the child said quietly, bowing to the couple before fleeing.

“No!" exclaimed Jiang Yanli and Cangse Sanren. Lan Wangji decided that he will look for a steam bun shop and buy both the shop and the food for his lover.

“Hey, hey! Kid, wait!” The shopkeeper calls him again and run towards him. “Wait!”

“Huh?” Wei Wuxian looked back. The shopkeeper comes to a halt in front of him and kneels. He smiled as he handed him a bun.

“Here is a bun. I promised to give you one. Go ahead, eat it.”

“Wait, what are you doing?!” Exclaimed his wife.

“Thank you; it is fine. I'm not really that hungry,” the boy said again, brightly smiling. He returns the bun to the shopkeeper's hand and bows before fleeing.

Staring at the boy’s back, the shopkeeper stands and sighed, “Aiya, it's New Years. The child is well-behaved; he isn't bothering anyone for food. What's the harm in giving away a bun?” He says as he returns to the stall.

Wei Wuxian gave the man in the screen a wide smile. Even if he was like that, that man was nice, sweet, and willing to give him a steam bun. He wondered if that man is still alive, probably older now, or maybe even dead.

Jiang Fengmian recalled Wei Wuxian refusing the things he gave to him, but as a stubborn man too, he did not accept the gifts being brought back to him, so Wei Wuxian was forced to accept all of it.

“I can't walk any longer,” the child sighed, leaning against the wall to keep himself from falling to the cold ground. He was trembling all over and is beginning to feel dizzy. He hadn't eaten in days and he was really starving.

“If I were there, I would’ve given him food,” A female cultivator comments, earning multiple nods from other female cultivators.

“You’d really waste your money to buy a food for a beggar like him?” A cultivator huffs. The obvious mocking tone made the female cultivators glare at him.

“Women should only focus on buying courting gifts for their significant other,” says another cultivator, who scrutinizes the female cultivators from head to toe. They shivered and backed away, but one female cultivator remained in her place. She fixed her gaze on the man, her aura cold and strict.

“I'd rather buy food for a poor child as many as he wants than buying courting gifts for a narrow-minded man like you,” a couple of female cultivators smirked at the two men, some of whom burst out laughing. The two cultivator's face flushed with rage and scoffed.

Then Wei Wuxian heard voices of two people approaching. “I'm too full to eat any more of this,” a lady said, holding a steam bun that looked hot and delicious.

“If you can't, don't force yourself to eat it anymore! We don't want to make that child in your belly uncomfortable,” her husband laughed, then turned to look at Wei Wuxian.

He was staring at the steam bun that they were holding. “Hey, little beggar! Come, come!” The man calls him over.

“Come over here, little boy,” the lady said as she smiled and waved at the child. “You can have this bun.”

“Thank you very much!” The boy smiled brightly and ate the hot steam bun right away. As the child eats, the couple smiled at him. The child looked so innocent, kind, and warm that the couple believed his smile could dispel all evil and troubles from the world. Despite his situation, he managed to smile, so blinding that they hadn't seen such a smile in anyone's lips.

“How does he keep smiling like that?” Nie Mingjue says, looking over at Wei Wuxian.

“Wei-Xiong was born with a smile on his face.” Nie Huaisang observes Wei Wuxian. Then he shifts his focus to the cultivator who piqued his attention—A cultivator who is laughing silently at Little A-Ying. He despises cultivators like him. Should he plan another assassination for people like him?

The couple then walked off, leaving Wei Wuxian in the middle of the street, happily whispering to each other, “I wonder if the one in my belly will be as handsome as that boy,” she says softly.

“Good looking or not, it’s still our child, right?” The man says, smiling. “As long as they can grow up safely, it's fine. What more can we ask for as parents?”

Wei Wuxian paused in his eating when he heard that. He looks at the couple's back, shoulders slumped. *‘Father.... 'Mother....'* he thought sadly.

“Don't worry, we'll never leave you again,” Wei Changze reassured his son.

“Please,” Wei Wuxian says, leaning into his father and smiling. He could feel warmth all over his body. He wished to have this moment forever.

Cangse Sanren then winks at his son, “Then we can plan another wedding for you and Second Young Master Lan.” Lan Wangji, Madam Lan, and Qingheng-jun, who were in the vicinity of the Wei Family, hears her. Lan Wangji's ears turned pink as he watched his and Wei Wuxian’s parents nod at each other.

“Should we plan another wedding when we get out of here?" Madam Lan looks at Cangse Sanren.

“We should,” she says, smirking as she notices her son's pink cheeks.

“Mother, there was never a wedding celebration,” Lan Wangji says, earning furrowed brows from their parents.

“There was not?” Qingheng-jun looks at Lan Xichen and Lan Qiren. They shook their heads, confirming Lan Wangji’s words.

“We did three bows already, but there was no celebration; we……eloped,” Wei Wuxian fumbles with his sleeves. Why is he suddenly embarrassed? He was the one *‘shameless’* one, he should have said it with pride.

“Huh, that's not so bad; why are you embarrassed?” Cangse Sanren pats his son on the back.

“Well that’s—” He didn’t get to finish his words when they heard a scream from the screen. A huge dog came out from the dark alley.

“No,” Jiang Wanyin and Jiang Yanli whispers, recalling their brother's fear. Lan Wangji and the disciples quickly turned their heads to Wei Wuxian, who hugged his parents even tighter, shaking in fear despite the fact that the dogs were only on the screen.

The dog growled, saliva dripping from its mouth corners. The dogs' pitch-black fur made them stand out even more against the snow.

Wei Wuxian steps back, trembling. "Stay away," Wei Wuxian said, shaking his head. “Stay away!” He yelled, and the dogs pounced.

And all of a sudden, the disciples realized, *'His fear of dogs made so much sense.'* They became increasingly concerned about their Senior. Their hearts racing as they turned to face him.

“No!” screamed a swarm of cultivators, terrified for Wei Wuxian. Jiang Wanyin and Jin Ling clenched their fists as they stared at the screen. Jin Ling has come to a decision to send Fairy away when Wei Wuxian is in his vicinity.

“Zewu-jun, you should prohibit dogs from entering Cloud Recesses,” Jin Zixuan suggests to Lan Xichen.

“Don't worry, Father. That rule is already on the Wall of Discipline,” Jin Ling says, his gaze fixed on the dog on the screen, and Jin Zixuan then places his hand on his son's shoulders.

“That’s good then.”

“Help!” He screamed, and the dog bit his other leg. “Help! Go away! It hurts! It hurts! It hurts! I’ll give you the bun. Stop!” He kept screaming, begging for help, but there were no signs of people around him.

“L-Lan Zhan!” He screamed as he heard another growl. Cangse Sanren and Wei Changze let go of their son to allow him to reach for his husband. Lan Wangji then cradled Wei Wuxian's head in his chest and tightly hugged him.

“Wei Ying, I am here,” he says quietly, and then repeats it multiple times. Sizhui, Wen Qing, and Wen Ning felt sad - their hearts broke for him, wishing they could also offer comfort and help to little A-Ying.

“Lan Zhan, Lan Zhan..”

“Mn. I am here, don't worry.”

Jiang Wanyin should not be envious, but he is. Before, Wei Wuxian calls for him, he was the person who protected Wei Wuxian from dogs, and he was the person Wei Wuxian sought when he needed comfort, but he was replaced by Lan Wangji so easily. This should not matter because they were now husbands, they comfort each other; Wei Wuxian could still seek his help and comfort, but they were still awkward with each other. Perhaps in the future he will be able to comfort and protect him as well.

Blood dripped down from where its teeth had sunk into his legs, pooling the ground dark red. Wei Wuxian thrashed and screamed as the dog bit so hard. The leg that had been bitten by the dog had turned violet red. The dog so much bigger than Wei Wuxian that the dog easily flings him around, asserting its dominance.

Then Wei Wuxian was slammed into the ground, crying out in agony. The dog let go of his leg and bit his arm hard. It appears to have bitten and broken his bone as well. Suddenly, he could picture himself dying at any moment if no help arrives.

“It's so amusing that the Yiling Patriarch is afraid of dogs; I can understand beasts, but this?” The body of the unknown cultivator shook as he laughed. He tried to cover his mouth with his hand to muffle the sound, but he couldn't. He couldn't stop laughing.

“Right?! How unfortunate the dog didn’t finish him of!” Another cultivator joined, mocking Wei Wuxian. Under the dangerous stare from Baoshan Sanren, he was forced to shut up.

“Agreed. Maybe I'll get a dog soon and train it well,” says another cultivator with a smirk.

“We can buy a much larger one. No, a spiritual dog would be preferable to a common dog.” Another cultivator joins too and snickers at Wei Wuxian.

Those who cared about Wei Wuxian shot everyone who mocked him with cold, and murderous glares. This sight is enough to make the disciples pee in their pants. Their glares said it all: *‘No one is allowed to make fun of Wei Wuxian.’*

Then, Zidian sparked.

'Oh no, Sect Leader Jiang is furious!' The disciples shivered. They all turn to look at Lan Wangji, and if Sect Leader Jiang was enraged, their Hanguang-jun was far worse. It was a miracle their Hanguang-jun did not draw Bichen and cut their arms

Lan Wangji calls out, "Sizhui, Jingyi."

“Yes Hanguang-jun?” They said simultaneously. They were terrified, but they realized what Hanguang-jun wanted from them.

“Remember their faces,” he orders coldly, and the two disciples nod firmly before turning to face the cultivators

'Don't tell us Hanguang-jun is going to go after them soon?!' Some disciples shivered at the prospect of their Chief Cultivator going on a killing spree.

Jingyi stuck out his tongue and waved goodbye to the cultivator, as if he knew he'd die soon in Hanguang-jun's sword.

“Children,” Cangse Sanren calls, and the disciples turn to look at her.

“I'll reward anyone who can remember all of the cultivators who mocked my son. Expect that I will give you anything you want.” With a smile that looks like she will kill you if you don't

agree to her words, the disciples nod vigorously, slightly intimidated but determined. Seeing Cangse Sanren's smile, some cultivators shuddered.

'You too?! Hanguang-jun is more than enough!'

Then, the disciples' gazes were drawn to the crowd. With watchful eyes observing them, those who mocked Wei Wuxian were forced to shut their mouths…for now.

Then someone appeared. "Da Huang! Da Huang!" The dog's owner calls, and Wei Wuxian could finally breathe again, relieved that help had arrived.

"Oh, thank God," Jiang Yanli said, trembling. Jin Ling tightens his grip on his mother's hand.

Jin Zixuan glances at Wei Wuxian. Wei Wuxian had been his classmate in the past. They were never friends or enemies, but they did fight once at the Cloud Recesses, which was his fault bad-mouthing Yanli. He completely regretted being such a jerk in the past.

In terms of cultivation, they were either equal or Wei Wuxian was far superior. Looking back, it never really occurred to him that Wei Wuxian would be afraid of dogs, though fear of bugs he could understand. Seeing his classmate like this, he felt like doing something too. And maybe he will soon.

"Help me!" Wei Wuxian screamed.

Another cultivator snorted unconsciously in delight, and Jingyi overheard. He quickly turns around, not allowing the disciple to see his face, but Jingyi has already seen his face and stuck a tongue out at him.

"Let go!" the man shouted, and finally, finally, the owner was able to get his dog off Wei Wuxian. He lies on the ground, trembling, lying on his own blood. Seeing this, the man's face contorts in disgust. Wei Wuxian's cheeks well up with tears as he reaches out to the man for help, but...

The man paid him no attention and did not even extend his hand to help him.

“Aiya, really,” sighed the dog owner. “Go back now, Da-Huang! I look away for a second, and you go and cause trouble for me! It's a good thing it's just a small beggar. What would you expect me to do if you bit someone's child and their parents came over to cause a scene?” He yanked the dog away. The man cast a final glance at Wei Wuxian before departing.

“Why are you leaving him?! Help him!” Wen Qing was becoming frustrated and helpless. As a doctor, the sight of an injured person itched her hands. She wanted her hands to work, to treat little A-Ying, but all she could do was watch the man abandon him in the cold snow. All she could do was lash out at him.

“Jie, please calm down.” Wen Ning consoles his sister. He, too, shares her sister's sentiments.

Jin Ling mumbles, “I hope that man is dead,” but Yanli hears him.

“A-Ling, do not speak like that.” Yanli reprimands.

“Sorry A-Niang.”

Jingyi leans over Sizhui and whispers, “You know, I kinda agree with Young Mistress.” Ouyang Zizhen lightly punches Jingyi's arm to silence him.

Wei Wuxian trembled on a blood-splattered patch of snow. Wei Wuxian sniffed as he wiped his tears, and sat up slowly, hissing and wincing in pain. Then he shifted his gaze to his side.

“Oh, the steam bun!” He crawls over to get it and takes another bite. Rather than being upset about what happened, he concentrates on his food, savouring its taste.

A new smile forming on his face, he says, “It’s good!” Tears fall again down his cheeks.

Another brave soul was about to open his mouth and speak up when he felt his soul leave his body as a swarm of eyes glared at him, daring him to speak up. Baoshan Sanren's lips quirk slightly and she shifts her gaze to the screen.

“Oh, A-Ying,” Cangse Sanren murmurs. Wei Changze embraced his wife as she sobbed once more. Even as Lan Wangji cradled his lover, Wei Wuxian couldn't stop shaking, but Lan Wangji kept whispering to him, assuring him that everything will be alright and nothing bad will happen to him.

Lan Qiren suddenly had a thought. What if he found Wei Wuxian first? What if his nephew dragged Wei Wuxian to the Yiling inn where they stayed? What if Wei Wuxian ended up in the Cloud Recesses? Lan Qiren imagined a little child running through the Cloud Recesses pathways, his rowdiness bringing laughter around, his smiles brightening the Sect's cold ambiance, his creative mind amusing and impressing others, and his shamelessness and bravery in breaking rules, angering the elders, he could feel the amount of headaches just imagining it.

He casts a glance at Wei Wuxian. He has hated him for a long time because he does not follow and breaks rules, and he is reminded of Cangse Sanren every time he looks at him. When he changed cultivation, his hatred for him grew even stronger. But, he had been proven innocent three months ago when Jin Guangyao’s crimes were revealed. As a result, his feelings and thoughts about Wei Wuxian became more complicated. Perhaps seeing Wei Wuxian’s memories might help him reorganize his thoughts.

Madam Jin sympathized Wei Wuxian even though she disliked him. ‘*How could Wei Wuxian keep smiling after being attacked by a dog?’* she kept thinking. *‘How can Wei Wuxian not be upset with the dog owner who abandoned him?’* It makes no sense at all. People are born with resentment hidden within them; seeing little A-Ying like this, she felt this kid didn't have any resentment held in his heart; he's just....innocent and pure. It felt as if the world didn't deserve him.

Winter had come to an end, and seasons started to change. It was now summer. People here and there were working, there were also children playing around. Then a

watermelon vendor announced.

“Watermelons! Watermelons, freshly picked! Huge and delectable! Come try a bite!”

The buyer in front of the stall hummed contentedly as he ate his sliced watermelon. After finishing his watermelon, the buyer looks at the seller and grinned. “You grow the sweetest watermelons after all! This year's summer has been extremely hot! I've only been pulling a cart for one trip and I'm already drenched in sweat! Hey, give me another slice!" The buyer says, and the seller immediately gives him another slice.

Then, the seller leaned in close to the man, whispering, “Hey, when you're done eating, don't just throw away the peel. Place it there.” The buyer looks over to where the seller had pointed. Then he continues, “There's a kid who goes around collecting them to eat.”

The man raised a brow. “A kid?”

“A very cute kid!” Nie Huaisang exclaimed cheerily.

“Yeah, a little street urchin. Well behaved and likes to smile.” The seller smiles when he notices someone. “Oh, look, he's here.”

Lan Qiren and Yu Ziyuan’s brow twitched at that. Wei Wuxian was far from a well-behaved person, but here, he was still a beggar, not the grown up mischievous Wei Wuxian.

It was Wei Wuxian, much older now, but his clothes were just as dirty as before. His body remained thin and pale.

Observing him, the cultivators gasp in horror when they realized that the number of scars of bite marks on his body seemed to double, and he also had wound infections.

Wen Qing and a few of the cultivators cursed under their breath.

“Here,” the watermelon vendor said, as he hands him the watermelon rinds.

Wei Wuxian's eyes light up and smiles. “Thank you very much!“

***‘Huh, he really does like to smile. Born with a nice face too. If I’d known about that, I’d have left a few more bites for him.’* Thought the buyer, who had turned earlier to look at the child.**

“Mn, Wei Ying is beautiful.” Lan Wangji says proudly and Wei Wuxian flushes.

Hiding in his husband’s chest, he responds, “Lan Zhan, warn me will you? My poor heart can’t take it!”

“Mn.” He nods, but Wei Wuxian knew Lan Wangji is not gonna warn him, ever.

Another year had passed, and winter had returned, with snow falling from the sky and blanketing the ground and surroundings in a white. The scene brought them in the back of an alley. Then, they heard loud growls. Four large, wolves towering over the trembling Wei Wuxian.

“No, no no…” Yanli whispers as she shakes her head. This thing that cornered her brother now were not common dogs. They were wolves.

“Get away! Run!” Mianmian exclaims, and then realized that Little A-Ying can’t hear him.

The wolves corned the trembling child slowly, saliva drooling in the corners of its mouth. Wei Wuxian's eyes welled up with tears as he tried to scoot further away, but he was too weak, too paralyzed by fear, to move. When he saw a small rock nearby, he grabbed it and threw it at the dogs, desperate to get them to leave.

A small rock, on the other hand, cannot scare or injure a dog. Because of the Wei Wuxian's weak arms, the small rock only landed on the floor about a meter away from the wolf.

“Please make this stop, I can't watch this anymore...Please, please, please..” Wei Wuxian pleads. He began crying and trembling again after calming down. The same as before, Lan Wangji embraced him tightly and kept whispering to him.

The cultivators stared at the large wolves. They had long and large teeth, their fur blacker than night, and their glowing yellow eyes staring hungrily at Wei Wuxian. The chances of escaping these predators, especially if they were in a pack, were extremely slim. Wei Wuxian could die if no help arrives.

Jiang Wanyin, Jin Ling, and Jin Zixuan froze as they watched the large wolves approach little Wei Wuxian. As they love dogs, common or spiritual, they tend to forget that there are wild dogs too, such as wolves. Seeing this, they couldn’t help but clench their fists. A common dog can bite, but a wolf can consume an entire person.

The largest wolf took another step closer, and Wei Wuxian wanted to move, wanted to get away, but there was no escape route. Then, two more came from behind an alley, and so on until there were six wolves staring down the trembling child.

“Fuck, why are there no people around?!” exclaimed Nie Mingjue. “Of all the people in Yiling, no one crossed their path in that alley?!”

“It looks like an abandoned alley,” Wen Ning says, shaking slightly, terrified for his friend, but he knows he will be fine.

“Their growls are loud enough for people to hear; why weren't there any people checking around?” Madam Jin became more annoyed, her brow furrowed.

Jin Zixuan responds to his mother with a sigh, “Assuming there are no cultivators or hunters around, it's obvious that no one will venture out and chase those wolves away.”

He had a point.

Wei Wuxian continued to shake his head. He'll die, he'll die, he'll die, he'll die, he'll die, he'll die, he'll die, he'll die, he'll die! He can't die now! His parents will return and look for him; he can't give up!

Jiang Fengmian sighed with relief. This was the moment when he found him. But he frowned, and the repeated words, *'He'll die,'* did nothing to help them. Was this Wei Wuxian's thoughts in this scene? Did he really thought he'll die?

Half of the cultivators flinched, frightened. Their hearts were racing, and even though they knew nothing would happen to him since Jiang Fengmian found him, they were worried and afraid for him.

“Someone save him, please..” Sizhui pleaded, tears welling up in the corners of his eyes, praying for someone to show up and chase those wolves away. He doesn't want to see his Xian-gege bitten again, let alone eaten by wolves. Jingyi and Ouyang Zizhen stayed close to him, squeezing their friend’s arm.

Forcing himself to stand, the wolves growled again. He looked over, only to fall to the ground as the wolves pounced.

“No!!” Several cultivators cried out again. The loudest one was Nie Huaisang. Lan Wangji’s jaw clenched. When will this end?

“Wei Ying!”

Wei Ying immediately looked away, covering his face with his little arms. He waited for the wolves to bite him off, but they never came. Instead, the wolves' growls were replaced by whimpers. When he lifted his eyes to look over, the wolves were gone, and a person was now standing protectively in front of him.

“Fengmian..” Cangse Sanren and Wei Changze sighs in relief.

“A-Die!” Yanli cheered and Jiang Wanyin felt like a heavy weight had been lifted in his shoulders.

“Fengmian, thank you…Thank you so much..” Wei Changze and Cangse Sanren bow to him, and Fengmian reciprocates. Yu Ziyuan gave the couple a sidelong glance before turning away. They won’t be thanking him anymore. They will most likely be enraged by the scenes they will witness soon.

The man turns around. The Jiang clarity bell on his waist swayed lightly as he knelt before Wei Wuxian. Relief is evident in his face, then he smiles. “Don’t worry, you’re okay now. You must be A-Ying.”

Perplexed and befuddled that someone recognized him, he asked, “You are…?”

“Ah, my name is Jiang Fengmian, and I am a friend of your parents,” he responds, surprising Wei Wuxian even more. He looks at the man's face, trying to recall if he's ever seen him with his parents before.

Wei Wuxian dared not to hope. This man could be deceiving him. However, the man in front of him looked at him with so much familiarity. “You…know my parents?”

“I do. Your father is Wei Changze, right?” He inquires softly, and Wei Wuxian is taken aback.

“Yes!”

Wei Changze smiled at Jiang Fengmian, as well as Wei Wuxian who appeared to have calmed down.

Lan Wangji then lets go of Wei Wuxian. He turns to the Jiang Patriarch and Matriarch and bows before saying, “Jiang-shushu, Yu-Furen, thank you for raising me and providing me with a home. I'll never be able to repay you.”

‘There he goes again with the repay’, Jiang Wanyin clenched his jaw. Then he looks at his mother, who seems to want to say something, most likely to scold or to badmouth him again. Without hesitation, he approached his mother's side and gripped her wrist tightly. The unexpected contact startles Yu Ziyuan. She turns to face his son, who shakes his head. She immediately understood his son’s intention, so Yu Ziyuan scoffed. After a few seconds, she turns to her son again. Looking up, she realized he is now taller than her and exuded the aura of a great leader with authority. She couldn't help but feel proud.

“There's nothing to pay, A-Xian,” Yanli responds with a smile. Wei Wuxian fixed his posture, his eyes still rimmed in red. He looked at Jiang Wanyin and gave a wet smile.

Noticing Wei Wuxian's hunger, he pulls out his qiankun pouch and pulls out a fresh sliced watermelon. “A-Ying, do you want to eat this?”

Wei Wuxian’s eyes lit up. “Watermelon?”

He held out the sliced watermelon to him. “I bought it for you. Do you want to eat it?”

“Yes! Thank you very much!" He quickly accepts it, slowly eating the watermelon to savor the flavor. A moment later, Jiang Fengmian spoke.

“A-Ying, why don’t you come back to Lotus Pier with Uncle? There are a lots of delicious foods there. Right now, lotuses are in season. The seeds are very sweet, as tasty as watermelon. You’ll definitely like it.”

The Jiang siblings nodded, and some cultivators who had not visited Lotus Pier yet wondered if they could go and try the famous lotus seeds as well.

Wei Wuxian was taken aback once more. He passed many people in Yiling, but no one bothered to offer him shelter for a short time, not until this uncle appeared in front of him. "R-Really?" he asks almost in hushed tone.

“Really. I’m not lying to you. Come, I’ll take you home.” Jiang Fengmian extends his hand, and Wei Wuxian looks at it, still unable to believe he is being taken home by a friend of his parents.

With a soft laugh and bright smile, Wei Wuxian nods. “Okay!” He takes Jiang Fengmian's hand and in a split second, he is hauled into the man's arms. Witnessing Wei Wuxian’s delighted and relieved expression, Jiang Fengmian chuckles. Both then left the alley.

Jiang Wanyin recalled his father bringing Wei Wuxian home while he was playing with his puppies. Wei Wuxian cried and clung to Father’s arms when he saw the puppies and was then immediately consoled by him. Jiang Wanyin was envious at the time because his father did not carry him like that ever since his core manifested. Yanli noticed the change in emotion on his brother's face. She grabbed and squeezed his hand to comfort him. He looks at his sister who smiled at him. He’s glad she’s here now.

Cangse Sanren, Wei Changze, Lan Wangji, and the disciples smiled at the sight of delighted Little A-Ying. It’s relieving to see his smile again after everything that has happened.

“I also have a son called Jiang Cheng. He’s around the same age as you. He’s a great kid, I’m sure you can become good friends.” Jiang Fengmian’s voice starts to fade as he walks away to the alley. Then the screen flashed, and everything turned black.

“Huh? Is that it?”

“We are finished?”

“I thought we were gonna see more.”

The disciples tried to keep their voices low so that their complaints would go unheard. Unfortunately, the Immortal has acute perception, and she huffs in amusement.

“That’s all for now. The screen will flash again in a few moments with a new scene, so be patient,” she says before turning to face the cultivators. “All right, let's talk about what we've seen.”

“Sure, let's talk about it. What does the earlier scene have to do with proving Wei Wuxian's innocence?” A man crossed his arms, clearly irritated.

“Well, we needed to see how Sect Leader Jiang saved Wei Wuxian first,” Nie Huaisang responds. “I'm referring to the previous Sect Leader Jiang,” he adds.

“And? We only saw Wei Wuxian being bitten by dogs and some shit. It would have been preferable if the dogs had finished him off.” Lan Wangji’s head snapped quickly towards the man. He is tempted, he really is tempted to draw his sword out and cut his tongue.

“Yeah. Without Jiang Fengmian saving him, he was as good as dead. How fortunate.”

“Right? If that's all I'll be able to see for a while. It would have been preferable if I hadn't been dragged here."

“But if we hadn't been dragged here, we wouldn't have known the Yiling Patriarch's fear. We can use it as an advantage!”

“Oh yeah, I’ll adopt a dog soon. A ferocious spiritual dog.”

The men cultivators went on as if no one was paying attention to them. Half of the cultivators, including Baoshan Sanren were glaring at them. Enraged, Lan Wangji's hand

begins to shake, and the veins in his jaw and forehead begin to bulge. Jiang Wanyin was much worse, Zidian crackled and extended, his face dark.

“Shut up, shut up!” Jiang Wanyin hissed angrily.

“I suggest you all stop if you want me to seal your golden cores.” Baoshan Sanren warns, her tone strict and cold.

"How arrogant of you, Immortal, to flaunt your power like that,” a man remarked. They really did not fear the Immortal at this point.

“Respect the Immortal!” Nie Mingjue’s voice thundered throughout the temple. Now that they had chosen to disrespect the Immortal, it’s was time for him to speak. Some of the cultivators flinched, startled by his voice.

“Let me remind you that the person you're speaking with is a legendary immortal cultivator, not an ordinary cultivator. She has the ability to kill you at any time if she so desires,” Nie Mingjue adds.

Baoshan Sanren gave a bitter chuckle, “I'm flattered, Sect Leader Nie, that you think so highly of me.”

“Of course,” He then bows to her.

Nie Huaisang is standing next to his brother, his fan covering half of his face. His timid demeanor had vanished, replaced by a cold one. Before, he killed cats in a gruesome fashion in order to lead the disciples to Yi City. He was not even sorry for what he had done. If he needs to order someone to kill every dog in the cultivation world to protect his friend, he would, and will do it.

“My Grandmaster is too kind to do that, Sect Leader Nie Mingjue, but I suppose I'd be happy if she did.” Cangse Sanren said stonily. Hers and Wei Changze expression turned dark and

murderous.

“You'll expect worse from me, child.” Baoshan Sanren responds, her hand shining gold again. But then, the surroundings darkened and they shuddered. They could sense whips of resentful energy coming from a specific person.

“I won't let you do that, Immortal, but I am willing to,” Wei Wuxian’s whole demeanor changed. His voice was dark and full of venom as his head was lowered. Tendrils of black smoke encircled his body, as if they're protecting their master from anyone. When he glances up, his eyes are already red, the corner of his lip lifted up. “Torture them of course.” he finishes and Lan Wangji paled.

“Wei Ying, no.”

“Wei Wuxian, don’t!”

Wei Wuxian was aware that there were still those who despised him and wanted him dead. Normally he wouldn't care about someone making fun of him, much less bad-mouth him, but the cultivators were going too far. He couldn't focus on them earlier because he was crying and trembling in fear, but now that he's calmed down, he strides towards them, only to be stopped by his husband.

“Lan Zhan, let go,” he says darkly, not looking at Lan Wangji.

“Wei Ying, no.” He pleads.

“Lan Zhan.” He repeats again, his tone even darker, warning him to let go.

The cultivators shivered, especially the juniors. This was no longer Wei Wuxian, but the Yiling Patriarch.

Cangse Sanren, Wei Changze, Jiang Fengmian, and Yu Ziyuan were at a loss for words. The black smoke surrounding Wei Wuxian…..there was no mistaking it, it was resentful energy.

“Wei Wuxian!!” Yu Ziyuan yelled, and everyone flinched. Wei Wuxian was startled by the loud noise and turns to Yu Ziyuan, who is now approaching him but is being held back by Jiang Wanyin and Jiang Fengmian.

“San-niang, don’t—”

“You are really a disgrace to the Jiang Sect! You dared to use resentful energy?!” She thrashed, desperate to escape his son's and his husband's grasp. She wanted to slap Wei Wuxian, punish him for switching cultivation, but Cangse Sanren, Wei Changze, Lan Wangji, Wen Ning, and the disciples stood protectively in front of Wei Wuxian.

“Yu Ziyuan, you're yelling at my son right in front of me,” Cangse Sanren grits her teeth. Despite the fact that he and his husband are as perplexed as Jiang Fengmian and Yu Ziyuan, she was not about to see his son getting slapped and yelled by her.

“He's practicing demonic cultivation! He will tarnish the name of—” A loud slap made everyone stop. All of the cultivators widened their eyes. The disciples, on the other hand, had their jaws dropped.

“You will say that when we see everything. I’m sure my son has his reasons.” She says and Jiang Wanyin flinches, which did not go unnoticed by her, but decided to let it aside. Yu Ziyuan touches her cheek before glaring back at Cangse Sanren.

“Cangse Sanren!” she shouts once more.

Cangse Sanren also exclaimed, “Yu Ziyuan!”

“San-niang!”

Could not hold anymore, Lan Wangji steps forward. “Whether Wei Ying is practicing demonic cultivation, and you wish to punish my husband for it, is none of any Yunmeng Jiang Sect's business.” Lan Wangji says coldly, glaring at the Jiang Matriarch. He will not tolerate this woman's behavior. If he has to attack her if she dares to land a hit on his husband, then he will do so without hesitation.

Yu Ziyuan turns to him. “Lan Wangji, the second young master Lan, dares to speak to me in this manner?” Yu Ziyuan smirks and continues, “Whether Wei Wuxian is your husband or a member of the Gusu Lan Sect now, we raised him and have the right to—”

“With all due respect, Yu-furen, please refrain from bringing up punishment for my son's husband. We have no idea what happened,” Qingheng-jun is frowning but he said it calmly. Even Madam Lan, Lan Qiren, Lan Xichen, Madam Jin, Nie Mingjue, and Wei Changze all frowned to the side, not liking the way she is treating Wei Wuxian. Madam Lan was so tempted to ask as to how such an aggressive woman could be Jiang Fengmian's wife.

Jin Ling had heard rumors and claims in the Lotus Pier that his Grandmother, Yu Ziyuan, and Grandfather, Jiang Fengmian, were not in good terms, frequently fighting. According to some, Jiang Fengmian did not love Yu Ziyuan, which is why they always argued. Some also claimed that his grandmother was abusive, particularly at Wei Wuxian, punishing him for an apparent reason or not. Jin Ling finds this difficult to believe, but seeing his Grandmother now accusing Wei Wuxian upsets him.

It's understandable that she's upset because she does not know everything that happened after Lotus Pier's demise, but for her to treat his uncle like this, he wants to protect him, speak for him, but what good would it be if he chose to speak now?

Jiang Wanyin had enough. He sighs tiredly, “Mother, she is right. Wei Wuxian had his reasons,” Jiang Wanyin's face contorted with guilt. Behind Lan Wangji, Wei Wuxian lowered his head. His red eyes turned back to purplish grey, and the tendrils of black smoke had faded.

“What could be his motivation for going so far as to switch cultivation?!” She argued. Patience dwindling, Lan Xichen steps forward too.

“Yu-Furen, this is another matter to find out later, please be patient until we see everything.” The disciples gawked at Lan Xichen. The ever-smiling cultivator, Zewu-jun, was frowning!

Jingyi leans to Jin Ling and Ouyang Zizhen, and murmurs, “Damn, you owe me four golds, Zizhen and Young Mistress.”

“Why do I owe you 4 golds for?!” Jin Ling looks at his friend incredulously; he has no recollection of agreeing to a bet or anything.

“Why, what for?” Zizhen asked, confused as well.

“In case you forgot, you three made a bet two months ago on whether Zewu-jun will frown again in the future," Sizhui explains.

A Lan disciple incredulously stared at Jin Ling and Jingyi, “Bro, he just got out of seclusion.”

“That does not matter! I want my golds!” Jingyi protests.

Zizhen felt the urge to roll his eyes, but did not do it. He turned back to Sizhui, “And then?”

“Jingyi bet that Zewu-jun will frown again in the future while the two of you disagreed, so as you can see, you owe him 4 golds,” Sizhui further explains.

“Really?” Ouyang Zizhen paused for a moment, perhaps trying to recall their wager. Jin Ling, on the other hand, groaned.

“We do owe him, damn.”

“The reason better be good. Demonic Cultivation is dangerous, it’s unorthodox. If—“ Yu Ziyuan paused as a sudden thought occurred to her. Her expression darkened. “This cultivation, it has something to do with Jin Zixuan and A-Li’s death, am I right?”

Startled, Jin Zixuan shakes his head. “No, Yu-Furen—“

“Shut up, Jin Zixuan! I didn't ask you!” Jin Zixuan flinched.

Madam Jin was taken aback and scowled at her friend. “Yu Ziyuan, did you not only yell at Cangse Sanren's son, but also at my son?”

“Enough!” exclaims Baoshan Sanren. She'd had enough of the drama. She expected something like this to happen, but not to this extent. “The next memory will be in a moment. Further concerns will be put aside and will be discussed later.”

Lan Wangji then turns to face his husband, caresses his cheek, and softly asks, “Wei Ying?”

“Lan Zhan.” He breathes out, suddenly afraid seeing his memories again. “Can I do this?” He leans into his husband’s touch. “Is this okay? Am I gonna be okay?”

Lan Wangji, being the sweet husband that he is, smiled and nodded. “You'll be fine; I will be with you. I will not leave you.” He reassures.

Wei Wuxian is really lucky to have him as his husband. He supposes that as long as his husband and his loved ones are here, he will be okay. He will be fine.

“You're so good to me, er-gege.” He whispered.

Lan Wangji kisses his forehead and responds, “Wei Ying is good to me too.”

Chapter End Notes

Y'all, I like guilt tripping, am I considered a bad person?

Cloud Recesses

Chapter Notes

I will post Chapter 3 either this week or next week. I thank y'all for your patience!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“Hey, I wonder how Senior Wei and Hanguang-jun met before.” Zizhen wondered, his brow furrowed as his mind began to work, picturing a romantic scene in which Wei Wuxian crashed into Lan Wangji's chest. Wei Wuxian apologized and looked up, realizing that the man in front of him was a beauty, an untouchable and peerless jade. The wind picks up, causing their hair to dance, making them more appealing to the other. Under the sun, he and Lan Wangji locked their gazes on each other's eyes and—

Sizhui, who looks at Zizhen who is most likely daydreaming, shakes his head, “I don't think their first meeting is going to go well. They fought, according to Xian-gege.”

“Really? Why hadn't I heard this before?” Jingyi turns to face Sizhui.

“Because I asked Xian-gege while he called me over the Jingshi,” Sizhui explained. That time, he found Wei Wuxian on the porch, drinking emperor's smile. When he saw Sizhui, he called him over and invited him to sit next to him. They talked about their recent night hunts. Their discussion dragged on until Wei Wuxian brought up the Wens and Burial Mounds. Wei Wuxian also mentioned how he and Lan Wangji ran into each other again in Yiling. Then, without thinking, he inquired as to how they first met, which is how he ended up telling Sizhui they fought on the roof.

That is most likely why the *'Do not fight on the roof'* rule was created.

“Wait, what were you doing there?” Jin Ling inquired, having overheard their conversation.

“I was just walking when he saw me and called me over,” he answered.

“Wait a minute, why are you wondering how they met?” A Nie disciple next to Sizhui inquired.

“I mean, don't you all want to know how they met? They're like, the most talked about couple in the cultivation world right now,” Zizhen said with a smile.

A Jin disciple smirks at Zizhen. “What gossip have you heard that you aren't sharing with us, Zizhen?”

Nie Huaisang then leaned in close, his fan still covering half of his face. “You'll be surprised, their previous relationship was quite interesting,” he says, as the disciples all look at him, hoping to hear more details. “At least to me,” he adds.

“They were like fire and water, Huaisang, that’s not interesting at all.” Nie Mingjue interjected. He's close enough to his younger brother and the disciples to hear what they're saying.

Nie Huaisang closes his fan and turns to face his brother. “Oh Da-ge, they are, but in a good way.”

“Huh? Fire and water? That’s not right.” Zizhen and Jingyi stared at Nie Huaisang incredulously.

“Look at them, they're like inseparable. They might as well glue each other until they die.” Jin Ling turns to face them, making a face that would make a Jiang disciple laugh.

“Yeah, it’s quite hard to believe.” Sizhui says, looking down. He can't say whether their fire-water relationship is good or bad, but his Xian-gege went through a lot of hardships to protect the Wens. He recalls his Uncle Wen Ning telling him that Wei Wuxian and Lan Wangji's relationship deteriorated after he began protecting the Wens. Wen Ning wasn't present when they fought, but he could see how it affected Wei Wuxian.

“Mingjue,” A voice called out. Nie Mingjue turns and sees Lan Xichen approaching him.

“Xichen,” He faces him. He was well aware that when he died, he was transformed into a ferocious and vengeful corpse. His mind was not conscious too. All he wanted was to kill the person who killed him. He didn't know for sure, but he had a feeling he attacked Lan Xichen when he was in that state, and he was angry and upset of himself.

“I'm sorry,” he said as he cupped his hand and bowed. He could hear cultivators whispering around him. The previous Sect Leader Nie bowing his head? Quite shocking, but he did not care, all he wants right now is to apologize to his sworn brother.

“What are you sorry for? I should be the one apologizing to you for not believing you.” Lan Xichen sighs, his expression distraught. Until now, he is still affected by the events of Guanyin Temple. Then, he too, bowed in front of his sworn brother.

“I am sorry too, Mingjue.” He sounds like he’s about to cry, but he didn’t. Instead, he rises and smiled once more, but a forced one.

“I admit I was upset that you did not believe me, but that’s all in the past. You did nothing wrong.” He strides forward and comes to a halt directly in front of Lan Xichen. He placed his hand on his shoulder and smiled slightly. Then he proceeds patting his shoulder. Across the room, Lan Wangji looked at his brother. He's relieved that he and Nie Mingjue are at least talking right now.

“Their relationship may not go back to normal.” Wei Wuxian observes, and Lan Wangji nods.

“They have a lot of things to talk about.” He says.

“Is it going to start now?” Jiang Wanyin asked the Immortal. Jiang Yanli could hear his annoyance in his tone, so she takes his hand in hers.

“A-Cheng, be patient, okay?”

He scoffed again, but tightened his grip on her sister's hand. “Fine.”

“A-Zhan, how long have you and Wei Wuxian been together?” Madam Lan, who had been curious the entire time, couldn't help but ask. She missed a lot of things, especially her son's development.

Lan Wangji, who had been deliberating for some time, finally responded. “Three months.”

Qingheng-jun, who is standing next to Madam Lan looked quite surprised. “I assumed you two had been together for a long time.” Because of this, Wei Wuxian awkwardly laughs and scratched his nape.

“Well, a lot has happened, and I was a complete idiot back then.”

Lan Wangji sighs and shakes his head. “No, you were not. You had….priorities.”

“I did. But even if you had confessed back then, I would have rejected you right away.”

He did confess after he had taken Wei Wuxian away from Nightless City. In a cave, he hid a wounded, dazed, lost, and grieving Wei Wuxian. He confessed, pouring out his heart while transferring spiritual energy to him. Until now, he still hears the word *'Get lost!'* in his head. After years of reflecting on his actions, he came to realize that he should not have confessed to him at that time. He was well aware that Wei Wuxian was on the brink of going insane; he had no time to think about his words, but he was so desperate to save him—he did not want to lose him.

Wei Wuxian noticed his husband went completely still—he knew exactly why. “Hey,” He cups his husband’s face and gave him a smile. “Stop thinking about it. You know I was not in the right mind that time, right?”

Lan Wangji leans into his touch and closes his eyes. “Mn.”

Madam Lan and Qingheng-jun stares at the two. They are suddenly curious, wanting to know everything that has happened and what these two have been through. Qingheng-jun then moves his gaze to Lan Qiren.

Lan Qiren sighs, “Everything was a mess before.”

“I swear to God, Lan Qiren, if you have been harsh to my son, I will shave your beard once more,” Cangse Sanren threatens, and Lan Qiren sweats, grabbing his beard to protect it from her. She's about to see it, and he's worried that it won't be his beard that she has to shave soon. (Soon, he might wake up with a shiny head, he shudders just by thinking of this.)

“Haha, Mother—” Wei Wuxian nervously laughs, suddenly afraid for Lan Qiren.

“I mean, Wei Ying isn't that bad,” Wei Changze says, turning to face Lan Qiren. “Right?” He adds.

'He is as bad as your wife!' Lan Qiren screams internally.

“The screen is ready, be silent and sit.” Baoshan Sanren snaps her fingers, and the screen lits up.

“Finally,” Yu Ziyuan says quietly. Jiang Fengmian sighs as he looks at her out of the corner of his eye. He hopes there will be no fighting, but he sees it happening soon.

“A-Ling, come here,” Jin Zixuan calls his son, who happily stands up and runs to sit with his parents. Then, in the screen, three words appeared.

“Twenty years ago.”

“Wei Wuxian! Wei Wuxian! Wei Ying!” A young cultivator in purple robes appeared and called for his brother.

Jiang Wanyin froze when he saw his younger self.

Then, with jars of Emperor smile in hand, a person placed it carefully beneath the tree. The individual stands and spins around. This person was young Wei Wuxian, who had the same bright, blinding smile and joy as he was when he was a child. Laughing, he ran towards Jiang Wanyin, saying, “I’m coming!”

In the background, two people stood, their backs turned to Wei Wuxian. With their robes, they were easily recognized. These two people were Jiang Wanyin and Nie Huaisang.

“I was so short before.” Nie Huaisang remarked. “And my hair as well,” he adds. His gaze shifts to the younger Jiang Wanyin and he teases, “Jiang Cheng, you're short here too,” earning him a glare.

“Shut it.” He hisses, but there was no heat to it.

The screen goes black, and the words reappear.

“The 18th year of the reign of Xuanzheng, the year of Wuyin.”

Then, the screen lits up again and the world came to view. It was night time.

“Gusu, Cloud Recesses.”

“Wow, we’re starting off in Cloud Recesses?” Jingyi was ecstatic; he couldn't wait to see a younger version of their Hanguang-jun.

“Please don't tell me we'll start into that,” Sizhui sighed exasperatedly, palming his face. They just discussed how Senior Wei and Hanguang-jun met just now.

“Into what?” Zizhen inquired, suddenly tense.

“You were so sneaky back then, Wei-Xiong,” Nie Huaisang smirks at Wei Wuxian.

Wei Wuxian then returns the smirk, saying, “I couldn't wait, I was curious about Gusu’s famous wine,” before turning to his husband and whispering, “Do you remember this, Lan Zhan?”

Lan Wangji gave a nod. “This was the time I fell in love with Wei Ying,” he replied earnestly, making Wei Wuxian blush.

“Lan Zhan!”

Jiang Wanyin and Jin Zixuan sighed as they heard Lan Wangji's response.

A figure emerged from the dark and dashed across the bridge. The scene then changed, and Wei Wuxian jumped onto the roofs of the buildings. He was so quiet and sneaky that no one heard or noticed him. He hops once more and takes a look around. When he noticed that no one was around, he took out the jar of emperor smile, brought it closer to his nose, and inhaled the intoxicating scent.

“I think I see where this is going,” Madam Jin said.

Mianmian, who sit beside Madam Jin gives a nod. “I believe so as well.”

Someone landed behind Wei Wuxian, prompting him to turn around. It was a man dressed in light blue robes, with a ribbon on his forehead and a sword in his hand. It was young Lan Wangji staring back at young Wei Wuxian.

The disciples eyed their Hanguang-jun, expecting some sort of reaction, but he just simply stared at his younger self.

“Wow, even at such a young age Hanguang-jun is still so attractive.” remarked a female cultivator.

“I know,” says another female cultivator, “though he looks completely different.”

“Yeah, he looks stiffer and more rigid here.”

The disciples heard the first and last remarks and must admit that they agree.

“Look at young Hanguang-jun, he looks scary.” Zizhen said, shuddering. If the younger Hanguang-jun gives him a glare, he will instantly pee in his pants.

“Oh, come on, Hanguang-jun can't be that bad, can he?” Jingyi turns to face Sizhui, and the cultivators who heard him shudder.

‘His younger counterpart is far worse than Jiang Wanyin!’ All the cultivators except Lan Wangji, Wei Wuxian, Lan Xichen screamed internally.

Instead of being concerned about being caught, he looks around once more to see if anyone is nearby. When he sees that no one is around and that only this young cultivator is in front of him, he turns to Lan Wangji and gives a playful smirk. Then, he held up the jar for him to see and offered it to him with a bright smile.

“Emperor’s smile! I’ll give you a jar, so could you pretend you never saw me?”

And the screen turns black again.

“That’s how you met?” The disciples asked simultaneously that Wei Wuxian laughs.

“Yeah, what are you all thinking?” He smirks.

Jin Ling scoffs, his arms crossed. “Tch, no wonder there's a rule in the wall of discipline that says *‘Do not fight on the rooftop.’”*

Wei Wuxian looks at his nephew. “Hey! How do you know that?” He was quite offended by that.

“You were apprehended, Senior Wei, and you bribed Hanguang-jun with the Emperor's smile; obviously, you two are about to fight,” Zizhen says as he turns to face Lan Wangji and lowers his head. Hanguang-jun is terrifying even when he isn't doing anything.

“I did not bribe him!” Wei Wuxian retorts.

“You did, Wei Wuxian.” Jiang Wanyin sighs exasperatedly and Wei Wuxian clutches his chest as if he was shot.

“Chengcheng, you did not just expose me!”

“Wei Wuxian.” Yu Ziyuan warns and he immediately stops. Lan Wangji's family, Wei Wuxian's parents, and the disciples all frowned at her before turning away. Jin Ling looks down, uneasy with the way she’s treating Wei Wuxian. Why is she so mad because his uncle simply teased his other uncle? They were just teasing each other, what's wrong with that? Jiang Wanyin and Jiang Yanli just sighed, wishing they could just silence their mother.

“Xuan Zheng, Year 18, Gusu Cloud Recesses.”

In the screen, they saw a Wei Wuxian running, and behind him is Jiang Wanyin. “We made it!” Wei Wuxian yells, still running until they reach the bridge and come to a halt. “Let’s take a break, rest a bit!” Wei Wuxian says, panting heavily. Then Wei Wuxian stretches as Jiang Wanyin adjusts his robes before turning at Wei Wuxian.

“If you get up late again, I definitely won’t wait for you.”

Wei Wuxian responds with a laugh, running his fingers through his silky hair before turning around and smiling.

“Look, young Sect Leader Jiang isn't much scary here,” a disciple murmured, fearful of being overheard and receiving a glare from Jiang Wanyin.

Jingyi gives a nod. “Right? He's like Young Mistress around here.”

Jin Ling, who heard him, gave him a glare but did not respond as he was afraid of being scolded for being such a brat by his parents and his grandparents. Jiang Wanyin heard Jingyi but remained silent. Why would he argue with a kid? Jin Ling then turns to face the screen, staring at his Uncle, who has chubby cheeks and big round eyes. He gotta admit, it's strange to see his Uncle this way.

“Huh, you don’t hate each other.” Jin Ling says absentmindedly. When he realizes what he just said, he turns away from Jiang Wanyin.

“Of course not. We were—” He did not intend to finish the sentence and focused his attention to the screen. Of course, they were fine here, with the teasing and hitting and all. He doesn't want to admit it in his head, but in his heart, he missed these kinds of interactions with Wei Wuxian.

“Now that we've seen the younger Wei Wuxian, he's really good looking,” a man from behind says, drawing strange looks from the other men around him.

A female cultivator who is overjoyed that a man appreciates Wei Wuxian's beauty concurs. “No because you're right! He looks far from those paintings of him for sale in towns.”

“I also heard from before that Wei Wuxian was ranked 4th in the list of top cultivator gentlemen of his generation,” another female added.

Lan Wangji heard them and smiled smugly, but quickly corrected his expression. His Wei Ying is really beautiful that it hurts. Lucky for him that Wei Wuxian is his.

“Senior Wei, I think I know why you get angry when you saw those pictures of yours.” Zizhen chuckles.

“Why?” Changse Sanren inquires, curious, along with Wei Changze.

Wei Wuxian scoffs, “I would appreciate their efforts if I didn't look like a demon lurking in the dark and eat children in those pictures.”

Wei Changze's eyes widen in disbelief, “Were you painted as a demon?”

“Cangse-gaoji, Wei-qianbei, the town folks had never seen Wei-gongzi before. They just assumed he looked like *that* because of the stories about him,” Lan Xichen explains.

“Wei Ying?” Cangse Sanren and Wei Changze look at their son, just scoffed and crossed his arms.

“Believe me, the stories were ridiculous, and very.....creative.” Wei Wuxian responds flatly.

“It’s just being late. We’ll be punished to stand at worst, what’s there to fear?”

Behind the two were two men wearing golden robes walking to a nearby path, slowly approaching Jiang Wanyin and Wei Wuxian.

“Oh look, it's you, husband,” Yanli says to Jin Zixuan, who blushes immediately. He was an arrogant and spoiled brat in the past, and he constantly badmouthed and disrespected Yanli. He just knows he'll get a lot of glares and threatening from Wei Wuxian, Jiang Wanyin, the Jiang Matriarch and Patriarch, his mother, and possibly his own son. He sighs, wishing he could get out of here and bury himself in shame.

“Father..” Jin Ling observes the young Jin Zixuan, his father.

“Jin-xiong, I pray for your life.” Nie Huaisang whispers, pitying Jin Zixuan.

Despite the fact that he and Nie Huaisang were not close, he appreciated his pity. (He didn't.) “Thanks, I guess.”

“Zixuan-xiong,” Jiang Wanyin greeted. Wei Wuxian turns around and both of them gave a respectful bow to him. Jin Zixuan, looking arrogant and a brat as always, just cast them a nonchalant look before doing an incomplete disrespectful bow and walk off.

And Jin Zixuan cringed. He could feel the piercing gaze from his mother. If he could turn back time, he would really correct his mistakes.

“Zixuan, you are such a—“ Madam Jin just sighs.

“Sorry Mother.”

From the corner, he could feel Jiang Wanyin and Wei Wuxian silently snickering at him.

Jin Ling could somehow understand now why everyone kept pointing out that his attitude is a mix of his father's and his jiujiu. Then, he looks at Suihua being held proudly by his Father. It was now the sword he's using.

Wei Wuxian rises and huffs. "Jin-xiong is getting more pompous."

Jiang Wanyin, despite frowning a bit, agreed to Wei Wuxian's words, "Lanling Jin Clan is wealthy as a king. Jin Zixuan is god's favoured one, of course he's pompous."

Jin Zixuan, in disbelief, sighs and face palms, "Why do people think I'm God's favoured one?"

Jiang Wanyin shrugs.

"Zixuan-xiong, your family is very wealthy," Nie Huaisang says matter-of-factly. Madam Jin's brows might have twitched because of that statement. Jin Zixuan stares at Nie Huaisang for a moment before dismissing his response and turning to Yanli.

"Was I really that bad?" Jin Zixuan quietly whispered. Yanli chuckles and reaches for his hand.

Their sister was too kind; both brothers were certain she would respond with a kind *'no,'* so the Jiang brothers simultaneously shouted "Yes!"

Because of this, some of the cultivators, including the disciples, laughed silently. Jin Ling was not sure what to feel at the moment.

"Oh, you two." Jiang Yanli sighs.

Bringing a hand to his chin, Wei Wuxian hummed mischievously, a thought flashing through his mind when Jiang Wanyin suddenly elbowed him, causing him to stumble.

“Ah!” He winced and rubbed his back to relieve the pain.

“Wait, stop thinking of mischief!” Jiang Wanyin lectures. “I'm warning you, Jin Zixuan is our sister's fiancé, and they'll marry one day. Bear with it even though you dislike him.”

Chuckling, Wei Wuxian responds, “Alright, alright.”

“Honestly, if I'd known he was this arrogant, I would've let Wei Wuxian do his thing,” mutters Madam Jin, causing Wei Wuxian to laugh. Jin Zixuan paled as he remembered how painful Wei Wuxian's punches were. He had gotten a lot of it in the past.

Jin Zixuan looks over at Jiang Wanyin. “I’m glad you stopped him.”

“It wasn't for you,” Jiang Wanyin deadpanned.

“Still.”

The scene shifts, giving the cultivators a clear view of the Orchid room. When the Lan disciples saw this, they straightened their backs.

“The Orchid room.” Wei Wuxian sighs “Its name is elegant, but the old master who teaches in there is stuffy.”

Lan Qiren's brow twitches in annoyance as Cangse Sanren and Wei Wuxian snort. He was clearly not amused by this. Jiang Fengmian, Lan Xichen, and Nie Mingjue coughed to hide their laughter. Some of the cultivators found it amusing. Some older cultivators, however, will have to agree with Wei Wuxian for this.

“I’m sorry, Old Master Lan! You were not supposed to hear that.”

Cangse Sanren continues to laugh as he shakes her. "No, no, child, it's true in any case; let him hear it and perhaps he'll try to change!”

“I. will. not!” He hisses, making Cangse Sanren laugh even harder.

“Cangse, stop now.” Wei Changze was concerned about how red Lan Qiren's face was becoming; he was clearly irritated, and he appears to be on the verge of fainting.

“Brother, don’t start fainting now.” Qingheng-jun joins, giving Lan Qiren a full smile, his eyes held a bit of teasing and mischief.

The betrayal in Lan Qiren's face was so clear. “How are you even my brother?”

“But he’s really capable though. Even a useless person could become a decent man after 1 or 2 years of his discipline.”

“Wei Wuxian is clearly not one of them.” Wen Qing says, shaking her head.

“Qing-jieeee!” Wei Wuxian whines. “I am a decent man!”

She released a fond sigh. “Sure.”

Lan Qiren, despite hearing his students praised him, still frowned, refusing to be swayed by words.

Not far away from them, two cultivators dressed in dark green with gold robes. Hearing their voices made these two cultivators turn to face the pair.

“Am I not decent enough already?” Wei Wuxian asked.

The disciple at the distance was young Nie Huaisang, who smiled when he saw the two, and calls, “Jiang-xiong! Wei-xiong!”

“Woah, it’s the Second Young Master Nie,” A Nie disciple stares, quite surprised that nothing has changed to their Sect Leader except his hair got longer and he’s taller now.

"Yeah, he looks cute too," says another Nie disciple. Nie Huaisang, who was nearby the disciples, laughs when he hears this.

"Thank you, kids."

“A-Ah…U-Umm, you’re welcome, Sect Leader?”

“You’ll definitely become the mark of disgrace on Master Lan’s career in teaching.” Jiang Wanyin says before acknowledging Nie Huaisang’s greeting, giving him a short nod.

The other Nie disciple, beside Nie Huaisang, had his brow furrowed, "Wei-xiong is just a Yunmeng disciple; why would he come to Gusu to study?" He inquired, perplexed.

“He’s not just a disciple from Yunmeng, he’s my—” Jiang Wanyin closes his eyes and sighs. After everything that has happened, does he still have the right to call him brother?

“I mean, Senior Wei is a head disciple, and he's also a genius, so why not?” Jingyi says, rolling his eyes, drawing the attention of some cultivators. *'Why isn't this kid behaving like Lans does?'* They all thought. Noticing their stares, Jingyi adds. “What? It’s true!”

Ouyang Zizhen joins, nervous but determined. “Yeah! He deserves to study in Cloud Recesses!”

“God, I love them, Lan Zhan.” Wei Wuxian giggles in Lan Wangji’s chest while Lan Wangji strokes his husband's hair and responds with a heartfelt *'Mn.'*

Nie Huaisang happily responds. “Wei-xiong is the son of the Clan Leader Jiang’s old friend. He’s been treated as his own son.”

“Glad we have the same thoughts, Second Young Master Nie.” Yu Ziyuan hissed under her breath. Even the rumours reached Qinghe. She hates this, she hates that his husband acknowledges Wei Wuxian more than their son. Jiang Fengmian avoided making eye contact with her, preferring not to have another argument with her in front of everyone.

Cangse Sanren clenches her teeth as she says, “Yu Ziyuan.” Wei Changze took her hand in his to stop whatever she was planning, but the cultivators noticed the slight anger in his expression.

Nie Huaisang suddenly felt bad for saying that. He did not intend it in that way. He did hear the rumors about them, which was kind of convincing, so he quickly believed them. He realizes he should've looked into it further, but as a child, what we hear is what we believe.

“I see, that explains why they don’t look like master and servant, they seem like brothers.”

The scene shifts to Jiang Wanyin and Wei Wuxian, who are playfully nudging each other as they walk towards Nie Huaisang, a smile on their lips.

Wei Wuxian smiled sadly, staring wistfully at the screen while Jiang Wanyin looked down on the ground. They are still brothers……

They are……

They were……

Jin Ling's chest tightened as he observed his two uncles interacting as if they were the happiest brothers in the world. He could see how close Wei Wuxian and Jiang Cheng are; they both cared for and loved each other dearly, but war happened, and their bonds severed. Sacrifices were made, which was even more painful than Wei Wuxian's defection to the Jiang Sect.

After the events of Guanyin Temple, neither brothers had time to talk or reconcile, as Jiang Cheng went into seclusion and Wei Wuxian and Lan Wangji eloped. He stares at the screen before promising that he will do everything in his power to bring these two idiots together. Their relationship may not be the same as it once was, but at least they could communicate without upsetting the other.

Some of the cultivators were at loss for words. In the past, Jiang Wanyin expressed his hatred for Wei Wuxian, led the siege, and killed him (this is what the cultivators believed, which clearly wasn't the case), but seeing this scene in front of them, they could not believe. *'Were they really this close?'* They all thought. They were accustomed to seeing Wei Wuxian and Jiang Wanyin arguing all the time during the Sunshot Campaign, so it was strange to see them being playful to each other.

“Jiang-xiong, Wei-xiong, this is your first visit to Gusu. It’s boring here, isn’t it?” Nie Huaisang curiously asked.

“Not really,”

Without turning to Wei Wuxian, Jiang Wanyin began recalling his complaints from before, “You whined about how stuffy Lans are on the first day, and complained about how bland their foods are, and how many rules they have—“

Wei Wuxian, of course, had to stop him as he was getting a glare from Lan Qiren, while Madam Lan and Qingheng-jun chuckled. “Chengcheng, shut up! It was a joke okay? I love

Cloud Recesses now.”

Jiang Wanyin rolled his eyes. “That’s because your husband is there.”

“The problem is getting up too early,” Wei Wuxian says as he stretches again.

“Here we get up at 5:00am seems fine,” Nie Huaisang opens his fan and began fanning himself. “When do you get up?”

“Him?” Jiang Wanyin scoffs, his arms crossed as Wei Wuxian yawns. “He gets up at 9:00am and rests at 1:00am. Once awake, he doesn’t train or meditate, but goes canoeing, plucks lotus, and hunts pheasants.”

“I’m still the best in pheasant hunting!”

The majority of the cultivators rolled their eyes at his proclamation, while a few smiled.

“Senior Wei still does that,” Sizhui says with a smile.

“Of course he does, he’s Wei Wuxian,” Wen Qing mutters.

“And Hanguang-jun lets him.”

Wen Qing sighs, “And of course he does.”

Closing his fan, Nie Huaisang spoke, “I want to study in Yunmeng next year! No one can stop me!”

Nie Mingjue immediately turns to his younger brother and raised a brow. Nie Huaisang, although hiding his face behind his fan, could tell that his elder brother was opposed to this.

“You want to go Yunmeng when you haven’t passed your studies at Gusu?”

“Y-Yunmeng seems fun,” Nie Huaisang responds. “But don't worry about what my younger self said; it was a long time ago!”

The other Nie disciple puts his hand on Nie Huaisang’s shoulder and says, “Huaisang-xiong, no one will stop you, but your elder brother will break your legs.” Nie Huaisang deflated and sighs.

Wei Wuxian laughs at the response, then he says, “Actually, Gusu is kinda fun.”

All the disciples, including Lan Qiren turns their attention to Wei Wuxian, their eyes narrowed as if his words are not believable.

'But Gusu was indeed fun! If the rules just did not exist at all.'

“Don't look at me like that; I had a great time while I was there,” he smirks turning to Nie Huaisang who was now giggling.

Jiang Wanyin turns to look at him, “You mean breaking every rules and annoying Lan Wangji?”

“A-Cheng, it's not annoying Second Young Master Lan, but wanting attention from Second Young Master Lan,” Yanli explains and smiles as he catches Lan Xichen smiling as well. Wei Wuxian, however, nods furiously in agreement.

“No A-Jie, he—”

Lan Xichen then joins in, saying, “I agree with Miss Jiang Yanli,” and Jiang Wanyin's eyes widen.

“You too?!”

Cangse Sanren laughs. She could picture his son breaking every rules and annoying Lan Wangji, especially Lan Qiren’s reaction. Even she could hear his yelling and complaints in her head.

“He's just like you, Cangse,” Wei Changze says fondly to her ears, and she agrees wholeheartedly.

“Are you kidding me, Wei-xiong? Here’s my sincere advice,” Nie Huaisang leans in to whisper, not wanting anyone to hear him. “Cloud Recesses is not like Lotus Pier. During your visit in Gusu, do remember not to provoke a certain person.”

Wei Wuxian turns to him and asks, “Who? Lan Qiren?

With or without Wei Wuxian’s provoking, Lan Qiren will still be provoked by his mere presence, or him just mentioning his name, it's ridiculous.

Wei Wuxian smirks, leaning to his husband’s ear. “Lan-er-gege, guess who my younger self should not provoke?”

Lan Wangji sighs fondly, however he did not respond to his husband’s teasing, but Wei Wuxian laughed anyway.

“Not the old man, it’s his favourite disciple. One of the Twin Jades of Lan—Lan Zhan.”

Then a man's forehead came to view, fixing his ribbon, it was young Lan Wangji, smoothening his hair.

"Lan Zhan?"

"My future husband." Wei Wuxian says, smirking and the hand in his waist tightens. Wei Wuxian hopes it will leave a mark.

"Lan Wangji?" He asks again for confirmation.

"Yes, exactly. He's a model example of the legendary 'other people's children' that parents tell you to look at. Heavens, he's the same as us, but he has none of the energy of a youth. He's stiff and strict, even worse than his uncle! He also supervises punishments and is high-skilled, so everyone is scared of him, but he cultivated in seclusion for years, so we don't see him often." Nie Huaisang explains.

And that's how Nie Huaisang ended up bowing to Lan Wangji and Lan Qiren, muttering *'I'm sorry'* over and over until both Lans simply nodded at him. Lan Wangji is well aware of how bad his attitude was in the past. He was raised in a home where rules were applied in their daily lives and spoken like prayers, so it's understandable why he's like that. Years of reflecting on his actions in the past made him realize how badly he had treated his husband—becoming angry at him, refusing him, and pushing him away, it was painful to remember, but at that time, he was entirely confused, if not, intimidated by the unknown feelings forming in his heart that he had not yet felt from anyone else.

Until now, the disciples had paled when they heard Nie Huaisang's words.

"Is he a boy who looks quite handsome?" Wei Wuxian asks.

Madam Lan laughs as she says, "A-Zhan, your ears are burning."

Jiang Wanyin who was following behind them, asked, “Is there anyone who looks ugly in the Gusu Lan Sect? His sect doesn’t even accept disciples with unclean features. If you can, find me one who has an average face.”

Wei Wuxian nods twice as he recalls the young man's face, “Very Handsome.”

The female cultivators may have screamed, while the men simply scowled.

‘That's right, be envious; you all look like street rats in comparison to Hanguang-jun!’ All the female cultivators thought.

Then Wei Wuxian continues, “He’s dressed in white, wearing a forehead ribbon, carrying a silver sword on his back with a sour face that he looks like he’s at a funeral.”

That shouldn’t be funny, but it was funny. Majority of the cultivators laughed at that while Lan Qiren was displeased. Wei Wuxian knew better, it was not funny, even for Lan Wangji. Wei Wuxian frowns and returns his attention to his husband. When he noticed a slight change in emotion in his husband's eyes, his expression softened. Longing and regret.

“Lan Zhan, I—”

“I know, don’t worry.”

The three enters the orchid room, completely unaware of young Lan Wangji’s presence who was sitting perfectly straight at the side. “Yes, that’s him. However, he prefers to meditate alone, so how did you see...” Nie Huaisang turns and immediately shrieks upon seeing the person they're discussing right now. Lan Wangji's sitting posture is straight as his back is against them, his hair blew both ends of the ribbon and his long hair, and he slowly turns his head to face them. From there, he appears even more dashing.

“He's so pretty!!” Some cultivators squealed, and some men felt even more envious. Why weren't they blessed with such beauty? The Second Jade is really…

Wei Wuxian began to feel slightly nervous, completely caught off guard by his presence. Then, he smiled awkwardly, “Why is he here?”

Recovering from his shock, Nie Huaisang pointed his fan to Lan Wangji to follow his gaze and his fan come to a halt at Wei Wuxian. Wei Wuxian turns away, refusing to make eye contact. Seeing this suspicious reaction, Nie Huaisang opens his fan and covers face of his face as he stares suspiciously at his suspicious friend.

“Wei-xiong, did you step out of line?” He asks.

“He did, didn’t he?” Nie Mingjue sighs.

Madam Jin chuckles, though her eyes are slightly disapproving. Lan Xichen, knowing where this is going, laughs quietly while Lan Qiren shakes his head.

He responds, “Well...” with a sidelong glance at Nie Huaisang.

Then, the surroundings darkened, the scene shifting to where Lan Wangji caught Wei Wuxian on the roof. “Late returners are not allowed in until the end of 7:00am,” he said with a cold glare. “Leave.”

“Ah, Hanguang-jun looks so regal.” The disciples stared in awe at their revered young Lan Wangji.

“I was such an idiot before for not kissing you at that moment,” Wei Wuxian wiggles his brows, causing Lan Wangji to laugh a little. For a brief moment, Qingheng-jun and Madam Lan were taken aback by their son. They would not have heard it clearly if they had not been standing next to their son. Their son laughed, THEIR SON LAUGHED!

Thrusting one jar of Emperor's Smile forward to young Lan Wangji, he responded with a grin, "I'll give you a jar, so could you pretend you never saw me?" Wei Wuxian waited for a moment, but the man remained silent. Getting no reaction from him, he continues, "Make a smile! You'll be much cuter."

"Shameless!"

If would've been better if it was Lan Wangji who said that, but it was the Old Master Lan, staring at the young Wei Wuxian disapprovingly.

"Alcohol is forbidden in the Cloud Recesses."

Lan Xichen laughs at this irony. Before, Lan Wangji detests people who does not adhere the Sect's rules and punishes them, yet, it was now him breaking the rules for Wei Wuxian. Their Uncle almost went Qi Deviation after discovering his nephew is hiding a bunch of Emperor's Smile in the Jingshi.

"Are you gonna fight here, Senior Wei?" Zizhen is trembling with excitement. He is desperate to see these two fight. He had heard rumors before that Lan Wangji and Wei Wuxian were equals in terms of fighting and cultivation.

"Yes, though I don't have my sword here, but anyway, watch carefully kids," he winks, and all of the disciples stare at the screen, not blinking or turning away.

"What exactly is *NOT* prohibited in here?" Wei Wuxian counters.

"You." Lan Wangji whispers, and Wei Wuxian may have combusted at this point.

Jiang Wanyin sighs, "Ugh, am I gonna taste dog food until this ends?"

“I’m afraid all of us will.” Jin Zixuan responds and Jiang Wanyin glares.

“You've got A-Jie; you'll be like those two later,” Yanli and Jin Zixuan couldn't decide whether to laugh. Jin Ling would prefer not to imagine his parents as lovey-dovey as Hanguang and Wei Wuxian.

“It’s clearly written on the Wall of Discipline. Go and read it.”

Sighing, he sat at a nearby tree branch. “There are over 3,000 family rules without repetition, who even reads them.”

By his response, Lan Wangji’s glare deepened.

Lan Qiren promptly massages his temples. Cangse Sanren giggles at this.

“Okay, alright, I won’t go in.” He bends his head down and tear the jar’s cover with his mouth. “I’ll sit and drink it here, that’s not breaking any rules, right?” Slowly, he lifts the jar above his head. The wine pours out as he drank it, but some of it did not reach his mouth, so it began trailing down to his neck. With the moonlight at the background, it gave a divine view of Wei Wuxian.

The disciples gaped in disbelief, “So bold, Senior Wei!”

Jiang Wanyin rolled his eyes, “Well, there goes the rule *‘Don’t drink on the roof’*.” He sighs. This was also the first night they arrived at Gusu. When he discovered that Wei Wuxian was missing from their room, he became concerned, thinking that the idiot was causing trouble again, and to see it here...

"Wow," Nie Huaisang and the female cultivators gasped, clearly taken aback by Wei Wuxian's shamelessness. Several cultivators scoffed, not even trying to hide their disgust on their faces.

“I knew you could not behave. First day at Gusu and you’re already causing trouble?! How far are you going to embarrass the Jiang Sect’s name, Wei Wuxian?!” Yu Ziyuan snaps. She earned a glare from several people but she did not care.

“The audacity of breaking the rules..”

“He is so shameless.”

Cultivators began to whisper in response to Yu Ziyuan's words. Jiang Wanyin was on the verge of yelling at his mother after noticing Wei Wuxian shrinking further into his husband's arms, while Yanli sighs, disappointed in her mother. Jiang Fengmian holds her arms tightly.

“San-niang, just please—“

Wen Qing, having enough of Yu Ziyuan’s bullshits, she spoke sharply, “With all due respect Yu-furen, Wei Wuxian is a free-spirited person. He causes trouble because it is a way to express himself. He is untamed, and he will remain that way.” All eyes turns to her. Some were surprised, while others were enraged. She then adds, “And he belongs to Lan Sect now as what Hanguang-jun had said. You are no longer required to be angry with him or to humiliate him. He will never bring your Sect's name into disrepute ever again.”

Cangse Sanren and Wei Changze had never met this woman, or what her relationship with their son is, but she was defending Wei Wuxian, which they appreciated and are grateful for.

Yu Ziyuan became even more enraged. Is this Wen even aware of who she is? “A Wen-dog speaking on behalf of a disgrace—”

“Mother, stop!” exclaims Jiang Wanyin. The Jiang Patriarch and Matriarch stared in disbelief at their son. This was the second time their son had yelled at his mother in this manner. Wen Ning and Sizhui clenched their fists in frustration at the Jiang Matriarch.

“Jiang Cheng,” he overheard Wei Wuxian murmur. He doesn't want to hear that sad and broken tone again, nor does he want his mother to insult his brother and the woman who saved them before.

“Just stop! Don’t talk until you know everything!”

The cultivators pitied the Sect Leader Jiang. His family was a shambles. Jin Zixuan tightly hugged his wife and son.

“Yu Ziyuan,” Baoshan Sanren calls, drawing everyone's attention to her. “Speak again, and I will not hesitate to silence you until everything is finished.”

Lan Wangji, shock at Wei Wuxian’s boldness, had enough and snaps, drawing out his sword.

The cultivators shifted their gaze to the screen. Everyone, especially the disciples, is anticipating the fight between the two.

Wei Wuxian, wiping the corners of his mouth, dodged Lan Wangji's sword, which was aimed at the jar. Lan Wangji attacks again, but this time he misses his target as Wei Wuxian easily dodges. Backing away, Wei Wuxian jumps backwards at the tree and shots forward. Lan Wangji had enough time to dodge as well.

Hair and ribbon flattering, the screen then focuses on Wei Wuxian, lips smirking, clearly entertained, and Lan Wangji’s expressionless face, but you can clearly see his eyes gleaming a little. Stepping back, Bichen strucks forward, but Wei Wuxian blocks the sword with his elbows. Noticing the jar's string wrapped around the blade, Lan Wangji swings the sword up to the sky and the jar shattered after.

The cultivators, particularly the disciples, were taken aback. That wasn't a sword fight, but still, they were really impressed. Both were equally strong and powerful at such a young age. Some cultivators were able to tell the difference in combat fighting styles between the two. While Lan Wangji's moves were precise and calculated, Wei Wuxian's moves were smooth and free.

“S-Senior Wei, please teach us that!”

“Yes, I would like to learn that move!”

“Wow, I knew Hanguang-jun was good in combat, but young Master Wei is...”

“I'd been to Lotus Pier before and heard the locals talking about him. They claimed that no one could defeat Wei Wuxian, especially in combat fights.”

Wei Wuxian giggles, his face flushed a bit. He was still not used to being praised in such a way.

While some were whispering praises, others were clearly expressing their annoyance.

“Why isn't he carrying his sword?” An unidentified cultivator indicated.

“Just like in the Sunshot Campaign,” adds another veteran cultivator, shaking his head disapprovingly.

Another cultivator agrees, sneering, “Right, he was so arrogant that time.”

Some cultivators did not miss the way Jiang Wanyin flinched. Those present at the Guanyin Temple knew exactly why, but in this scene, Wei Wuxian still had his golden core. Lan Wangji's hand gripped the hilt of Bichen tightly as Wei Wuxian frowns.

Having enough, Wei Wuxian snaps, “Why is everyone so obsessed of asking me where the fuck my sword is?!”

“It’s disrespectful!”

“You’re displaying your arrogance!”

“Whether or not my husband carries a sword is none of your business,” Lan Wangji sneers. He'd love to tell them the reason why his husband cannot carry his sword anymore, but it's not his place to do so. The cultivators will soon know, and he eagerly awaits their reactions. Perhaps smirk when they realized how wrong they had been in provoking and antagonizing his husband—how wrong they had been in judging his entire character.

That effectively silenced all of the cultivators. Jingyi laughs quietly, his arms crossed. He really admire Hanguang-jun so much. “Bet without a sword or not, Senior Wei can easily destroy their musty face.”

Sizhui and Zizhen turns to him, “Jingyi!”

“What? They’re definitely ugly, might as well make them uglier.”

“Huh?! Wandering past curfew, alcohol, and unsanctioned duels are banned in the Cloud Recesses. Y-You broke 3 rules on your arrival!”

Despite Nie Huaisang shock, Wei Wuxian scoffs and pouts, “The rules here are even more than ants,” and he has no regrets about breaking those rules. Then he returns his attention to the person who had piqued his interest—Lan Wangji.

Lan Wangji hadn't stopped looking at the three since they walked in. Of course, he heard everything, and that's what makes it worse as he narrows his eyes and gives a disapproving glare.

Nie Huaisang quietly slips away

The cultivators laugh a little, but for some, this scene is upsetting. One would never guess how these three best friends would turn out in the future. One of them is a prodigy—a demonic cultivator, a skilled manipulator, and a powerful Sect Leader. If these three's bonds were not severed, they would be a formidable force, a threat to the cultivation world.

In the meantime, Jiang Wanyin places his hand on Wei Wuxian's shoulder. “He’s targeted you. Good luck,” he says as he walks away. Wei Wuxian considers the warning for a moment before teasingly tilting his head, a smirk forming on his lips as he placed his hand on his waist.

“And this is where Wangji-xiong's suffering begins,” Nie Huaisang mutters, excitedly giggling.

“Good morning, Sir.” The students chorused.

The Lan disciples unconsciously sat up straighter, causing some cultivators to laugh.

Responding to his student’s greeting, Lan Qiren hums, “Please sit down.”

A soft thump was heard, and the scene changed. A scroll unrolled itself to the ground. The written rules in the scroll were visible to the students.

Some disciples shuddered at the number of rules, and for some, particularly Jin Zixuan, Jiang Wanyin, Wei Wuxian, Lan Wangji, and Nie Huaisang, this scene brought back so many memories.

Wei Wuxian audibly gasped as he stares at the unrolled scroll.

Lan Qiren came into view, stroking his goatee, “Gusu Lan Clan rules: no unsanctioned fighting, no promiscuity, no killing on premises, no wandering past curfew, no rowdiness, no running, no sneering—”

A female cultivator shuddered, “I feel like I'm in class.”

“God, why do we have to listen to this?” An unknown cultivator then complains.

“There are so many rules,” says the man's friend next to him. “If we have to apply those rules in our life, we might as well become statues.”

Lan Qiren heard them clearly and tries not to turn around and lecture them. The Lan disciples, Lan Wangji and Lan Xichen were listening intently. They were used to this.

Wei Wuxian turns to Lan Wangji and relaxes, propping his chin on his palm *“He’s so attentive to something this boring!”* He wonders.

Wei Wuxian blinks for a split second before gaping. When he said that, his mouth did not move, which means, “Those were my thoughts just now, don't tell me everyone is going to know what I'm thinking?!” He exclaims, a little panicked.

“Worry not, Wei Wuxian, I’ve restricted inappropriate thoughts.” Baoshan Sanren reassures, a mischievous smile on her face.

“Inappro—What were you thinking most of the time, Wei Wuxian?!” Jiang Wanyin exclaims, his face flushed.

“Mischief, Jiang Cheng, mischief! B-But that’s not the point! Grandmaster, why does everyone need to know my thoughts?!” Wei Wuxian protests. From the corner of his eye, he could see Mianmian, Jin Zixuan, Wen Qing, and Nie Huaisang smirking.

“What does it matter if we hear your thoughts? Everyone wants to know what's going through your head before and during the Sunshot—”

“Fuck off, old man. Nobody wants your opinion,” Jiang Wanyin says, causing Jiang Fengmian to sigh.

“No—” With a loud wack sound, Wei Wuxian flinched, startled, and quickly turned his attention to Lan Qiren. “Because no one bothered to read the rules from the rock wall, I'm going through them one by one now. Let's see who can break them and claim ignorance once more!”

Wei Wuxian tilts his head and wondered cheerfully, *“Is he talking about me?”*

“Obviously.” Mianmian couldn't help but respond, which made Wei Wuxian laugh.

“**Someone is still not paying attention,” Lan Qiren continues. “So, let's change the subject,” he says then turns to Wei Wuxian. “Wei Ying?”**

Predicting his response, Wei Wuxian cheerily raises his hand, “Here!” Then he chuckled as he noticed Lan Qiren sighing exasperatedly beside Lan Xichen.

“Such a sunshine!” Madam Lan whispers to his husband and he agrees without hesitation,

“Here!” Wei Wuxian responds, raising his hand and giggles as he rises to his feet.

"I still can't compare this Wei Wuxian to Yiling Patriarch," Nie Mingjue says, his brow furrowed.

“I concur, brother. Wei-xiong is...” He did not know what to say next. Perhaps it was because people were accustomed to seeing him cause trouble wherever he went and smile at the most ridiculous things. Witnessing him slowly changing after the demise of Lotus Pier was devastating—heart-breaking. Wei Wuxian was a person who was loud, cheerful, free, and kind, whereas Yiling Patriarch was cold, distant, and arrogant. He considers Wei Wuxian and Yiling Patriarch to be two distinct individuals.

“Who was the first in the cultivation world to focus on the rise of his clan instead of his sect?” Lan Qiren asks.

“The founder of Qishan Wen Clan, Wen Mao.” Wei Wuxian answers quickly.

“What was the profession of the founder of Qinghe Nie Clan?”

“A butcher!”

“How do we differentiate spirits, demons, ghosts, and monsters?”

The screen shifts to Jiang Wanyin gazing nervously at his brother as he responds once more, “Spirits are formed from living non-human beings; demons from living humans; ghosts from dead humans; and monsters from dead non-living beings.”

Jiang Wanyin breathes a sigh of relief.

“Oh, so that's the difference,” a Nie disciple murmured, pulling out a talisman to scribble down what he heard, just in case someone asked him.

“Should we be taking notes?” Jingyi asks Sizhui and Zizhen.

“I suppose we should.”

The disciples then all pull out talismans and start writing down.

“Look at your little ducklings, A-Xian.” Yanli giggles gazing at the disciples.

Cangse Sanren clicks her tongue, “Lan Qiren, really? You're specifically targeting my son.”

Lan Qiren decided not to respond.

“**What type of white peony is the symbol of the Lanling Jin Sect?”**

“Sparks Amidst Snow.”

Lan Qiren hums, somewhat satisfied that he got all the correct answers, but then he immediately frowns as he continues, “As a disciple of the Yunmeng Jiang Sect, you should know these facts like the back of your hand. Answering correctly is nothing to take pride in.”

“You must carry on, Wei-xiong! Please don’t give Lan Qiren a chance to call on anyone else!” **Several disciples thought at once.**

Several cultivators smiled in amusement as they observed the students’ reactions. Nie Mingjue turns to his younger brother, raises his brow. Nie Huaisang feels as if he will wilt from his brother's slightly annoyed expression.

"I'm sure Jingyi and Zizhen would say the same thing if they were there," Jin Ling smirks.

“Hey! I could answer that, you know!” Jingyi responds, a smirk forming on his lips. Sizhui knows Jingyi does not know the answers, so he simply shakes his head.

“Oh yeah? How about you Zizhen?”

“Well, I don’t know the answer to that, so maybe..?”

Jin Ling then turns to face his father, Jin Zixuan, and from the look on his son's face, he knows exactly what he is going to ask.

He sighs fondly, “I am one of them, so please don’t ask.”

Lan Qiren then begins to pace around the room. “There was an executioner with parents, a wife and children. He executed over a hundred people in his lifetime. He dies a sudden death, his body left on the streets for 7 days with the build-up of resentful energy, he started to haunt and kill. What should be done?”

“Well..” He trailed off, bringing his hand to his chin as he thinks for an answer.

Some cultivators were taken aback, particularly Nie Mingjue, Yu Ziyuan, and Jiang Fengmian. It was unusual to see Wei Wuxian unsure or did not know the answer. He was a genius, and with his mind working, they expected him to respond quickly as before.

Lan Qiren looks over to the student behind Wei Wuxian, who is Nie Huaisang, who is leaning down to cover his face with the book and shaking nervously in his seat.

“Don’t pick me! Don’t pick me! I don’t know anything!” **He whispers then glances up. Seeing that Lan Qiren is gazing down at him, he hides again.**

Some cultivators snickered, while others raised their brows, particularly those at the Guanyin Temple. Somehow, the phrase *'I don't know anything, don't ask me!'* is no longer credible, especially when spoken by Nie Huiasang, who was a master manipulator who concealed his true intentions behind a façade. Using that phrase frequently to avoid getting questioned or giving much information. He did not even care if he became a laughingstock in the cultivation world. However, in this scene, it appeared that he genuinely did not know the answer.

Nie Mingjue glared sharply at his brother.

Nie Huaisang nervously chuckles, “I swear Da-ge, I really don’t want to be picked because I don’t know the answer.”

Seeing that Wei Wuxian is not answering, Lan Qiren calls for Lan Wangji, “Wangji, tell him what should be done.”

Calmly rising to his feet, Lan Wangji answers, “First, liberate him. Make an appeal to his feelings for his family, grant his dying wish, and alleviate any lingering obsessions. If that fails, repress him.”

Then, Wei Wuxian's face brightened as a thought occurred to him. He sat down right away, spread the paper on his table, and began writing down his thoughts, completely ignoring the class. Behind him, Nie Huaisang watches firmly.

“If his crimes are grave and resentful energy persists, exterminate him. Cultivators should abide by this order in their exorcisms without fail.” Lan Wangji concludes, but then Wei Wuxian raises his brush up.

Knowing where this is going, Wei Wuxian frowns and leans more to his husband. Lan Wangji recalls the scene vividly and tightens his grip on his husband's waist. The grip should hurt, but Wei Wuxian found it comforting.

“I should not have asked that,” he says quietly.

“It is a theory, you’re only curious.” Lan Wangji says calmly.

“Hmm..”

Jiang Wanyin, Jin Zixuan, and Nie Huaisang shuffled slightly in their seats, feeling uneasy.

“I have a question,” Wei Wuxian says as he rises to his feet. “Granting his dying wish and relieving his obsessions appear simple in theory, but what if his obsession was to wipe out a clan for vengeance, what then?”

And this made the cultivators frown, particularly Yu Ziyuan, as they gradually realized what he was about to say next.

Lan Xichen stares at the screen intently, determined to silence every cultivator who disparages his brother-in-law.

“Thus liberate if possible, suppress if necessary. Destroy him if necessary.” Lan Wangji responds, his gaze fixed on his uncle.

“Such a waste! It’s not like I didn’t know this answer, I was only considering the 4th option.”

The cultivators frowned even more. Some smirked, ready to mock and disparage Wei Wuxian.

“I have never heard of a 4th option.” Lan Wangji says flatly.

“Here.” He presents the paper to Lan Wangji. In the paper, there’s a drawing of a man digging up a grave.

“A-Xian..” Yanli and Jiang Fengmian muttered worriedly.

“The executioner died a horrible death, he’d certainly turn into a feral corpse since he executed over a hundred before he died. Why not dig up the graves of the executed, arouse their resentful energy then let the hundred heads fight against the feral corpse?”

Jiang Wanyin sighs and face palms.

The cultivators suck in a breath. Who knew he came up with this theory in such a young age? Did he already predict the path he's going to walk on before the Sunshot Campaign? That's what some of them thought.

The students, as well as Lan Qiren had their eyes widened in shock as they listened. That theory definitely was the last thing they'll think of. Even though Lan Qiren had heard this before, it still did not fail to give him goose bumps.

"See?! He's already thinking of demonic cultivation since—" A cultivator raged but was immediately silence was Lan Xichen. "Hmmmp! Hmmphhh!" The man held his neck as his lips trembled, forcing his lips to open.

"If you don't want your mouth to bleed, don't force yourself to speak." Lan Xichen glares at the cultivator in the corner of his eye. Lan Wangji gave his brother an appreciative nod.

Those who were not there to see Wei Wuxian turn into a Yiling Patriarch were too stunned, bewildered, too confused. There's too many questions that they want to ask, yet they could not flood Wei Wuxian with questions as it will overwhelm him, so they decided to ask only if the memory ends.

'What had he become after we died?' Cangse Sanren and Wei Changze thought.

To Yu Ziyuan, she could not let this slide.

"So you have thought of this already, you disgraceful brat? What else does that brain of yours are hiding?" She glares, walking towards Wei Wuxian, only to be held back by Jiang Fengmian once more.

"San-niang, could you please stop? This is not the right time to ask about this."

“Then when is the right time, Fengmian?! This is what killed A-Li and Zixuan!”

“It was not!” Zixuan and Yanli exclaims simultaneously.

The disciples tensed, staring worriedly at their Senior Wei who is staring at the ground. It looked like he did not have any energy to argue at the moment and just let the cultivators argue and spout whatever bullshit they want to say. Wei Wuxian, he really looks tired, prompting Jin Ling and Sizhui to clench their fists. They want to speak so badly, to say something, but as kids, they knew better than to speak. If the situation worsens and their patience runs out, they will speak up, regardless of the reprimand they will receive later.

“Actually, I think the theory is good.” Nie Huaisang calmly interrupts and all eyes went to him, their face held disbelief.

“Huaisang!” Nie Mingjue exclaims.

“No, Da-ge, listen carefully to Wei Wuxian’s explanation.”

Lan Qiren whacked Wei Wuxian’s hand what was holding the paper causing it to fall on the ground. Wei Wuxian winces in pain and blew his hand, as if it will ease the pain.

“How dare you!” Lan Qiren exclaims, disgust displayed in his face. “The essence of purging evil is to liberate them. How dare you think of arousing resentful energy instead?! Reversing the natural order, disregarding ethics and morality!”

Lan Qiren then threw the scroll towards Wei Wuxian, but he simply dodged, letting the scroll hit Nie Huaisang’s face instead.

The Lan disciples and some cultivators gape in shock. They have not seen Grandmaster Lan so worked up like this. Wei Wuxian is really a menace to society.

The current Nie Huaisang might have flinched at that. Lan Qiren didn’t even apologize to him! Some even laughed at him! But that’s fine, he’s used to it anyway.

“Some things cannot be liberated no matter what, so why not make use of them? When Yu the Great tamed the flood, the inferior method was obstruction, and the superior method was redirection. Because suppression is the same as obstruction, isn't it inferior...?” Seeing Lan Qiren's rage, he decided to leave this subject and explain his other thought. “Spiritual energy is energy, and resentful energy is energy as well. The dantian stores spiritual energy, which has the power to split mountains and fill oceans and is available for human use. So, why can't resentful energy be harnessed as well?”

Listening to his explanation, everyone could say that his explanation was absurd, truly unorthodox. If this was explained by a child, one could argue that they are overusing their imagination. Even though some of parts of his explanation had a point, they were still wary of resentful energy. It did drove Wei Wuxian insane in Nightless City.

“What kind of an explanation is that?” An old man hissed.

Still angry at his explanation, Lan Qiren flicked his sleeve and glared down at him, “Then, let me ask you again, how do you make sure that resentful energy obeys you and does not harm others?”

Wei Wuxian may have winced quietly at that, and that subtle reaction did not go unnoticed by Yu Ziyuan, causing her to clench her fists and grit her teeth in frustration. She wanted to know everything at once, if Wei Wuxian was to blame for her daughter's and Jin Zixuan's deaths, and how Wei Wuxian had become this way. More importantly, she didn't point this out when she arrived, but she can sense his son's core. It was much stronger and more powerful than his previous core. Perhaps it was the result of his training, but it didn't make sense as his son had always trained hard before, and yet the results were always the same. Then again, perhaps she is overthinking things.

Wei Wuxian sat back down, palm to cheek, contemplative expression on his face. “Hmm, I haven't given it much thought.”

“If you've considered it, the cultivation world would not allow your existence!” With a loud slam, Lan Qiren exclaims, “Get out!”

Wei Wuxian heaves a sigh. “Grandmaster Lan, you completely predicted my future,” he laughs humorlessly. Lan Qiren just remained silent, but he could feel the stares from Cangse Sanren, Wei Changze, his brother’s and her wife, and the Jiang Patriarch and Matriarch. Jiang Wanyin lowers his head and Yanli notices this again, so she caresses her brother’s cheek and offered a comforting smile.

He salutes first before responding, “Goodbye!” and ran out of the room, laughing hysterically.

“God, he’s so shameless!”

“Why did Lan Qiren let him leave? He should’ve been punished!”

“He did get punished, later on.” Nie Huaisang responds.

The screen then shifts to reveal a night-time mountainous scene with a tranquil lake. On the dock below, several people were talking among themselves.

“It's already this late! Why hasn't the boat arrived yet?”

“Yeah! We've been waiting for so long. I really hope nothing went wrong.”

Looking straight ahead, a certain guy notices the boat approaching and exclaims, “It’s here! It’s coming, it’s coming!” The screen then shows the boat rapidly approaching the dock.

“The boat has arrived! Collect your belongings. Prepare to board!”

For some unknown reason, the cultivators became tense.

Below the lake, barely visible, was an approaching resentful energy following the boat. It extended and extended. The resentful energy, which looked like a giant snake from above the sky, swims rapidly all the way to the dock.

Several cultivators couldn't help but step back. Jingyi, feeling all his hair standing, curses loudly, "What the fuck is that?!"

"Jingyi! Watch your mouth!" Sizhui chastises.

"But look at that! It's so big!" Jingyi points to the screen.

"What's happening?!"

Jin Ling tenses. He'd seen and fought a lot of huge beasts, but nothing compared to the statue in Dafan Mountain, but this thing in the water was huge and dangerous. He could feel the amount of power from that thing just by looking at it.

"Waterborne Abyss." Nie Mingjue hisses and the Wen siblings lowered their heads.

The lake quickly became turbulent, causing the boat to shake violently. A cyclone of water erupted in the air, violently snaking through it. It wasn't just one, but it multiplied, resulting in larger waves. It circled the boat, trapping it in the middle and rendering it unable to escape.

"Water ghosts!"

"Water ghosts are here to kill!"

"I-It's so.." It's a female cultivator shuddered, unable to finish a sentence.

“I would’ve ran away if I saw that.” A cultivator commented, his body shaking in fear.

“How can water ghosts be so fearsome?! I'm afraid it's something even more sinister!”

“W-What….What can we do?”

Then, from behind the man, several cultivators appeared, flying through the air with their swords. Even though it was late at night, the people recognized the cultivators right away because of their robes.

“Wen Sect..” Nie Mingjue hisses even more. Wen Ning unconsciously moved backwards and shrunk, as if to hide himself from the people. Wen Qing held his brother’s hand tightly.

“T-That’s the Wens?” Zizhen gapes.

“Apparently.” A Jiang disciple responds.

“Qishan Wen Clan is here to purge evil. Everyone, leave!” A Wen cultivator exclaims.

The mere sight of the Wen Clan on the screen caused some cultivators to clench their jaws in rage. The Wen Clan had ruled the cultivation world for years, and even though they had defeated the Wens, they did not forget the atrocities the Wens had committed against the cultivation world.

“Formation!” exclaims an old Wen cultivator as multiple golden arrays appear in the sky, shining brightly in the night. Seconds later, the golden arrays combined into one massive golden array. Whips of gold encircled the cyclone of waters. It continued to shake violently, as if poisoned by the array, generating a large number of waves, and civilians watching the scene barely escaped as a large wave engulfed them.

Several cultivators shook their heads disapprovingly. How irresponsible of the Wen Sect to not prioritize the safety of civilians.

The disciples were fortunate not to come across anything as violent and dangerous as that.

“Did you know they're going to lead that thing to Caiyi?” Nie Mingjue glares at Wen Qing who remained calm under his piercing gaze.

“No, Sect Leader Nie.” She responds. Nie Mingjue narrows his eyes, clearly not believing her words when Wen Ning steps in front of his sister.

“I-It’s true, Sect Leader Nie. Jiejie takes care of me most of the time,….s-so she seldom knows the matters in and out the sect.”

After a few moments, the cyclone of water slowly sinks, eventually calming down. “Evil is purged. You can sail at ease from now on.” A Wen cultivator said, holding a lantern.

"Purged, my ass. That thing just created a mess in Caiyi," Jiang Wanyin rolled his eyes, and Lan Xichen agreed to his words.

“What did they do, Qiren?” Qingheng-jun inquires solemnly.

“You will find out later.” He answers.

The civilians thanked the Wen cultivators, completely ignorant of their reputation in the cultivation world.

Another Wen cultivator comes up to their leader. “Young Master ordered us to eliminate this evil creature, but all we did was drive it downstream,” he says quietly. “Is it appropriate?”

“What? Drove it downstream?” Jin Ling grips his sword's hilt.

“How so?” says the leader, turning to face him. “The creature underwater is extremely ferocious. Eliminating it is no easy task.”

“But it's Gusu Lan Clan's turf downstream, I'm afraid….” the other says worriedly, turning back to the lake.

“What about it?” scoffs the leader, “Over half of the cultivation clans are associated with our Wen Clan. A mere Gusu Lan Clan would never dare to cause a commotion.”

The entire Gusu Lan Clan clenched their fists in anger. If they didn’t adhere their Sect rules, they would have lashed out now.

“How dare they?” Madam Jin says venomously. If the Wen Sect had driven that thing in their area, she would’ve reacted similarly to them, but even worse.

"The audacity," Mianmian says quietly.

“Senior Wei, how do cultivators destroy that thing if it's really dangerous?” Sizhui inquires quietly. He was born a Wen. A Wen who became a Lan. Except for his friends and a few others close to him, his identity was not disclosed to the cultivation world for his safety. Seeing that scene in front of him made him want to vomit, a wave of shame washed over him. He was about to learn everything there was to know about the Wen Sect, their cruelty and atrocities, and he wasn't sure if he could handle it. Wen Qing could see his cousin's inner turmoil just beneath his subtle frown.

Wei Wuxian then turns to his little radish and responds, “We can't,” causing them to furrow their brows in confusion.

“We can’t?” They repeated and Wei Wuxian nodded.

“If we want the Waterborne Abyss to disappear, then we need to dry up the lake in the process, but since we can't do that and aren't powerful enough to do that, the only thing we can do is suppress them,” he says, knowing the cultivators are listening to him.

Zizhen then takes note of this, “So we have to rely on the sun to dry up a lake to eliminate them, huh?”

“Damn, I hate that you're saying that out loud,” Jingyi grumbles. He’s implying that he hates the Wen Sect, not the Sun, okay?

“Wei Ying and Zizhen are correct. If the sun is successful in drying up a lake, they will vanish completely, never to be seen again. However, there are many lakes and rivers in the cultivation world, so as long as there is water for the Waterborne Abyss to swim into, their manifestation will be inevitable and will continuously spread.” Lan Wangji calmly adds.

This might have been the longest time Lan Wangji have spoken, but the disciples were used to it as their Hanguang-jun and Senior Wei teaches them when night hunting. Madam Lan and Qingheng-jun were too stunned to speak, but deep down, they are pleased that their son is speaking so frequently and so fondly.

“Didn't you fight that thing before? How did you deal with it?” A cultivator inquires curiously.

“We did not fight it; we retreated,” Jin Zixuan responds.

“That thing lead us in the middle of the lake.” Jiang Wanyin also adds. He could not forget how Wei Wuxian saved Su She from drowning. After learning his crimes in the Guanyin Temple, he wishes Wei Wuxian could’ve let him drown and die at that day, but because his brother was good, of course he went to such lengths to help him. In his mind, he yells angrily, *‘Fucking Su She!’*

Then, the scene went back to Cloud Recesses. A tip of a branch was dipped into the water as the koi fishes swims closer to it. Then, a voice called, “Wei-xiong!

Wei Wuxian, who has been zoning out, looks over to Nie Huaisang. The screen pans out, revealing the beautiful scenery of Gusu to the cultivators.

“Wow, Gusu is really beautiful,” remarked a female cultivator.

“I know, I want to visit to Gusu someday.”

“Me too.”

Lan Qiren shouldn't be too proud of how beautiful his home is, but he is, and Wei Wuxian notices and laughs.

“Grandmaster Lan, do not be too proud.” He teases causing Lan Xichen, Qingheng-jun, Madam Lan, and Cangse Sanren to laugh.

Annoyed, Lan Qiren exclaims, “Shut up, Wei Ying!”

“Shouting is prohibited—”

“We are not in Cloud Recesses, Wangji, and you are learning how to tease!” Qiren points out.

“I am not teasing uncle; shouting is forbidden—”

Lan Qiren turns to Wei Wuxian, “Wei Wuxian, you are a bad influence on my nephew!”

“Wei Ying is a good influence on me, uncle,” Lan Wangji says, his eyes amused, and Lan Qiren wishes his nephew would return to being stoic and strict.

Lan Xichen then steps forward, “Alright, alright, calm down now Uncle, Wangji.”

Nie Huaisang and Jiang Wanyin were approaching Wei Wuxian, and behind them was Lan Wangji, simply watching them.

"Creepy, Wangji-xiong," says Nie Huaisang.

Seeing Lan Wangji from behind, Wei Wuxian beams and waves at him with the branch still in his hand. “Wangji-xiong!” He calls out.

But Lan Wangji, on the other hand, simply turns around and walks away, leaving the three together.

“He ignored me.”

“Hanguang-jun! You should not ignore Senior Wei like that!” Jingyi complains. Though Lan Qiren will not tolerate his behaviour, the child is completely comfortable with Lan Wangji, and Lan Wangji feels the same way, so Lan Wangji simply huffs in amusement.

“Don’t worry, Jingyi, he won’t ignore me later on, just watch,” he winks at him, and Jin Ling can feel his hair standing up.

“You’re going to annoy the hell out of Hanguang-jun, aren’t you?”

“Of course, A-Ling!”

“He sounds too happy to be ignored by him,” Jiang Wanyin says, rolling his eyes once more.

“I’d be surprised if he paid you any attention. Consider what you said in class; you're asking for it.” He raises an eyebrow and returns his gaze to the retreating back of Lan Wangji. "Both he and Old Master Lan are probably convinced you're fundamentally bad and completely twisted.”

“Yes—“

“No.”

“That’s right, Lan Wangji usually…No, he’s never this impolite but what you did..”

“Lan Qiren asked, and I answered,” Wei Wuxian laughs. “Of course, if he tells me to leave, I'll leave. Is there anything else he wants me to do?”

Nie Huaisang pauses for a moment before speaking, “Why does it seem like Old Master Lan is especially strict towards you? He always directs his reprimands at you.”

Cangse Sanren immediately turns to Lan Qiren, who avoids her gaze. “Remember, Lan Qiren, I will literally shave your beard and head if I’m going to witness you projecting your feelings to my son!”

“Mother, there’s no need to do that!”

"No, I'm going to do it; not even my husband can stop me!"

Wei Wuxian turns to face his father, but his father simply sighs, indicating that he is powerless to stop his Mother. Lan Wangji, Lan Xichen, and Madam Lan all silently chuckle

“You cannot!”

“I certainly will!”

Wei Wuxian then turns to Yanli to complain, “Shijieeee! Stop them!”

With a soft chuckle, she responds, “I can’t A-Xian.”

“Chengcheng—“

“I won’t, Wei Wuxian, leave me be.”

“Arghh, you’re all traitors!”

“It serves him right,” Jiang Wanyin scoffs, crossing his arms. “What kind of response is that? It is one thing if he says these nonsense things at home, but he dared to say them in front of Lan Qiren. He's looking for his own death!”

Wei Wuxian simply shrugged, “No matter how I answered it, he wouldn’t like me, so I might as well just say what I want to say. Anyway, I wasn't trying to offend him; I was simply responding properly.”

He should say something, anything, but at the moment, Lan Qiren could not afford to speak. Was he part of the reason why he resorted to demonic cultivation simply because he didn't like him? Wei Wuxian was interested in a lot of things, he was a curious child, a genius despite being annoying and loud. What he asked in class was a genuine question out of curiosity because he wanted to learn, but the problem was him, as he did not strive to comprehend his idea and simply disregarded it just because...it was resentful energy.

Then, Nie Huaisang turns to Wei Wuxian, his expression thoughtful, “To be honest, Wei-xiong’s words were quite interesting. Spiritual energy can only be obtained through cultivation and the painstaking formation of a golden core. That would take like a couple of years to do that, especially for someone like me, whose talents appear to have been gnawed by a dog while I was still in my mother's womb. However, resentful energies are emitted by fierce corpses. If they could easily be taken and used, it would be beyond wonderful.”

Several eyes turned to Nie Huaisang, who appeared to be ignoring their stares, but he couldn't ignore his older brother's intense gaze.

“Nie Huaisang..” He grits his jaw and Huaisang flinches.

"It's no surprise he and Wei Wuxian were friends," scoffed a cultivator.

"Both are talking about resentful energy as if it's simple to use," another cultivator sneers.

“Don't you think controlling resentful energy is interesting, Da-ge? We can command corpses and have them fight in our wars if we want.”

Wei Wuxian and Lan Wangji stared at Huaisang from the side, their expression unreadable. Half of the cultivators were displeased by this, but the idea of controlling the undead was truly intriguing, and surprisingly tempting, but they wouldn't go to such lengths to control resentful energy.

“Right?” Wei Wuxian says, languidly swaying a tree branch in the water. “Speaking of that, if we can cultivate readily available resentful energy, then the areas brimming with it won't be forbidden areas,” he says as he leans back to gaze at the sky. “Even Yiling Burial Mounds, that corpse hill, could become a land of fortune.”

The cultivators flinched at the mention of Burial Mounds, particularly Wen Qing, Wen Ning, Lan Sizhui, and Wei Wuxian. Lan Wangji drew his husband closer to him. Wei Wuxian notices his husband trembling slightly, so he looks up and smiles.

“Lan Zhan, I’m fine.”

“You are not. Keep leaning on me, I am here.”

Wei Wuxian sighs contentedly, “Mn.”

“Even back then, he was familiar with the Burial Mounds," a cultivator remarked.

"Who wouldn't know about the Burial Mounds, that place was literally a war zone before, reeking with so much resentful energy," a man responds, grimacing at the mere mention of the Burial Mounds.

The disciples who had been brought into the Burial Mounds before shuddered; they knew exactly what the cultivators were talking about and preferred not to discuss how they felt there.

“Enough,” Jiang Wanyin says, turning to face Wei Wuxian. “Your nonsense is out of control. You can talk about it, but never walk down that twisted path.”

“Why would I leave my broad paved road for a narrow plank on murky waters? If it were that simple, someone would have done it by now,” he says as he stands up to leave.

“Yet he failed to stay on that path,” A cultivator scoffs.

“If only you know what happened.” Jiang Wanyin whispers, his jaw clenched as he lowered his head. It was entirely his fault that Wei Wuxian had to give up that path for his sake. His brother…his self-sacrificing brother is really stupid! But who was he to say such a thing when he had done the same thing to save his brother? A sacrifice neither his brother nor anyone else knew about. Then, Jiang Wanyin was startled when a hand was placed on top of his, and he looked up to see Jin Ling looking at him worriedly.

“Jiujiu..”

“A-Ling, don't look at me, look at the screen.”

“But you are not—”

“I am fine.”

“A-Cheng..” Yanli and Fengmian was also getting worried seeing how Jin Ling is reacting while Yu Ziyuan was confused, but chose to remain silent.

“Just….I’m fine, focus on the screen.”

“It's still early, let's go pheasant hunting!” he laughs, wrapping his arms around Jiang Wanyin's shoulder.

Jiang Wanyin removes Wei Wuxian’s arms and steps back, “Cut it out! Lan Qiren wants you to copy the Book of Discipline three times, and reflect on your wrongdoings.”

“3 times?!” Wei Wuxian exclaims in disbelief. “I’ll ascend to the heavens after just 1 time! Not doing it.” He throws the tree branch behind him as Nie Huaisang runs to catch it.

“I’ll help you copy! I’ll do it!”

As a result, all of the adults, especially Lan Qiren and Nie Mingjue, were glaring at him disapprovingly. “Xichen, does he always do this at Cloud Recesses?” Nie Mingjue inquires, his tone too solemn to allow Nie Huaisang to crack a joke.

Lan Xichen laughs, “I wouldn’t know, Mingjue, I seldom go to their classes before.”

Wei Wuxian pauses and hums, as if considering his favour, “One who is unreasonably solicitous must be concealing nefarious intentions,” he says to Nie Huaisang, crossing his arms and smirking. “Say it, what do you want from me?”

“Well, Wei-xiong, you see...” he laughs nervously, scratching his cheek with his index finger, “Old Man Lan has a bad habit. He administers closed book exams on a regular basis…”

Wei Wuxian thrust a hand forward in a stopping motion, “Hold on, you want me to take your exams for you?”

Nie Mingjue simply sighs exasperatedly as the others laugh. Lan Qiren, however, was glaring at Nie Huiasang to the side.

“No, no!” Nie Huaisang grips Wei Wuxian's hand. “Simply share your knowledge. I've prepared everything.” He handed Wei Wuxian a small scroll, opened it to read it, and blew the paper.

“Old Man Lan has always found me annoying, if he founds out…”

“Please~ Wei-xiong! Don’t worry, I assure you that it’ll be fine.”

"God, Sect Leader Nie and Jingyi are so alike," Zizhen says, laughing as Jingyi looks at him in disbelief.

“Excuse me?!”

“Why are you so offended by this?” Jin Ling says, his brow raising.

“I am not like him!” He says as silent as before, afraid that Nie Huaisang will hear him.

“In a way, you are. When the exams are approaching, you pester Sizhui to share his knowledge,” Jin Ling says.

“That’s a polite way to say cheating, Jin Ling.” Zizhen laughs. Sizhui simply sighs and let them be. He doesn't mind Jingyi bothering him like that, he enjoys helping him. If only they will not be caught in doing so.

Jingyi whips his head to Sizhui, “Sizhui, I do not, right?”

Sizhui chose not to respond and instead....smiled.

The scene changed in an instant, focusing on Wei Wuxian, Nie Huaisang, and Jiang Wanyin walking up the stone stairs.

“I'm sure they failed,” a cultivator snickers.

“Right.”

“Ah...my apologies, Wei-xiong.”

“Didn't you say it'd be fine?” Wei Wuxian looks at him, arms crossed, as Huaisang lowered his head.

“Who would’ve thought that Lan Wangji would intercept?”

Wei Wuxian giggles, looking up at his husband, then to Nie Huaisang.

Jiang Wanyin then cuts in, “Anyway, look out for yourself. The library is up ahead.” They walk further more until they reached their destination. The screen let the cultivators see the panoramic view of the Gusu Lan's beautiful library. The entire setting exudes tranquillity, with fogs, tall trees, and mountains creating a scene straight out of a painting.

“Wow..” The cultivator’s gaped.

Dramatically sighing, Wei Wuxian spoke, “It’s just some copying, Huaisang~”

“Old Man Lan said no one can help you copy.” Nie Huaisang responds.

“Ha! How would he know if someone helped me copy? Would he send someone to supervise me?” He asks as he opens the library’s door.

Lan Qiren sighs exasperatedly, “I regret sending Wangji to watch over him.”

"Even if you didn't send Wangji to keep an eye on Wei Wuxian, Uncle, Wangji would still have been smitten with him," Lan Xichen responds, a smile forming on his lips.

"Grandmaster Lan, you were unconsciously a matchmaker at the time," Wei Wuxian smirks, winking at the man who is now fuming at him, but Qingheng-jun is calming him down.

“Exactly.” Jiang Wanyin deadpanned.

“Huh? What did you say?” He immediately turns to see Lan Wangji sitting across the room, silently writing while holding a book in one hand. When he sensed Wei Wuxian at

the door, he raised his amber eyes and made eye contact with Wei Wuxian's purplish grey ones.

“And this is where the fun starts.” Wei Wuxian whispers, smirking.

“We're going to see a lot of annoying Wei Wuxian in this,” sighs Jiang Wanyin, massaging his temples, “Ugh, my head is already aching.”

Blinking, he breathe out in disbelief, “Lan Zhan?”

Both Nie Huaisang and Jiang Wanyin quietly slips out of the library.

“Hey! You guys—” Wei Wuxian sighs and returns his gaze to Lan Wangji. “He's so quiet, but Old Man Lan wants me to stay with him for a month. What a torment for me.” He approached Lan Wangji and sat down in front of him, casually spreading his legs. He takes a look at the paper Lan Wangji is writing on before setting his arms against the table.

“Wangji-xiong, here’s a question, do you really hate me?” Wei Wuxian inquired cheerfully. He expected the second young master Lan to respond, but Lan Wangji, being Lan Wangji, didn't bother even glancing at him or responding to him.

Raising a brow, he spoke, “Still ignoring me?” Then he smiled mischievously and crawled his hands on the table, "Hey, hey...What should I call you to get a response?" After that, he crawls behind Lan Wangji.

Even when Wei Wuxian got close to him, the second jade did not even falter in his seat. “Wangji?.....Lan Wangji….. Lan Zhan!” He calls and sits on Lan Wangji’s sleeve.

Most of the cultivators face-palmed. Wei Wuxian really lives up to his reputation for being obnoxious. The disciples laughed heartily, but Jin Ling and Jiang Wanyin groaned in annoyance.

“God, why are you so annoying?” Jin Ling says, rolling his eyes, “I don’t even know how Hanguang-jun put up with you.”

“Hey! I am not annoying, and Lan Zhan isn’t putting up with me!” Wei Wuxian protests, tightly hugging his husband, while Lan Wangji huffs in amusement. “Shijie, I am not annoying, right?” He turns to his sister, fluttering his eyelashes.

Jiang Yanli, being the angel and best woman she is, smiles at him and says, “Yes, A-Xian isn't annoying, he's three, right?”

“Yes! Xianxian is three!”

Jiang Wanyin rolls his eyes, “You’re being childish again. Stop doing that, Wei Wuxian.”

“Nope,” he says as he pops the p.

Jingyi smirks, “I’m surprised Hanguang-jun did not attack Senior Wei with Bichen yet.” He says, eliciting a loud cough from Wei Wuxian, whose cheeks were now tinted pink. He suddenly recalls the Incense Burner dream, and he knows he isn't the only one who does as Lan Wangji's grip tightened around his waist.

“Are you alright, son?” Wei Changze inquires, suddenly concerned.

"Your cheeks are very red," Cangse Sanren observes, touching his son’s forehead.

"No, I'm fine," he chuckles nervously. “Don't worry about me."

"You know, Senior Wei's reaction is very suspicious," Zizhen remarks, then notices Lan Wangji's red ears. "As well as Hanguang-jun."

Lan Wangji paused his writing when he noticed Wei Wuxian sitting on his sleeve. He shot him a disapproving glare.

“Don’t look at me like that. I only called your birth name since you’re not responding to me when I called you Wangji. If you’re bothered by it, you can call me by my birth name as well. Is Lan-gongzi better?” Then his face brightened, as if he had suddenly realized something, “Oh, I got it, Lan-er-ge!” He grins widely.

Lan Qiren sighs, massaging his temples, “Xichen, please tell me why I let this shameless man marry Wangji.”

Lan Xichen must be evil, he is very entertained seeing his uncle’s turmoil, “He is Wangji’s soulmate, he makes brother happy, Uncle.”

“Perhaps you need a break, brother,” Qingheng-jun pats Lan Qiren's shoulders.

“Yeah, you look like you’re in a verge of fainting, Qiren.” Cangse Sanren adds.

In a split second, Wei Wuxian’s mouth was sealed shut, his face gradually turning red. He jumped off from the table and ran back to his seat, grabbing a piece of paper and a brush. After finishing writing, he presents the paper in front of Lan Wangji’s face which says…

“I’m sorry, Wangji-xiong! Please remove the Silencing Spell.”

Laughter filled the temple. It is really difficult to believe that the person in the screen is the Yiling Patriarch; he's obnoxious—annoying.

“Senior Wei, you really deserve that.” Jingyi snorts as Wei Wuxian pouts.

“How are you even a Yunmeng Head Disciple at this time?” Jin Ling asks, containing his laughter, but then, well—he couldn’t. The scene was too funny.

Even after reading the text, Lan Wangji brings the book up to his face, completely ignoring Wei Wuxian.

Some cultivators burst out laughing even harder. Lan Wangji's eyes crinkled slightly, amused, but as he remembered his dream, his ears turned red. He wondered if it would be shown on the screen. The Immortal wouldn't, would she? Baoshan Sanren isn't aware of his dreams, or rather fantasies, is she? He started to get nervous as his ears became even redder.

Seeing that he’s completely ignored Wei Wuxian crumpled the paper angrily and buried his face in his crossed arms against the table. Then he raises his gaze to Lan Wangji. He grabbed another piece of paper and slammed it down on the table. Lan Wangji, completely unimpressed, casts a glance at Wei Wuxian. Wei Wuxian didn't write anything in the paper this time, but he drew a wolf and a chicken and presented it to Lan Wangji.

The sketch is literally a play on Lan Wangji’s name because Lan sounds similar to ‘wolf’, Wang means ‘looking’, and Ji sounds same as ‘chicken’.

"You know, that's kind of witty," Nie Mingjue chuckles.

"I would have laughed if I were Lan Wangji," says an unknown cultivator.

Lan Wangji gradually takes up the sketch. Wei Wuxian was taken aback by this. Instead of expecting Lan Wangji to accept the sketch, he folds it twice and tosses it to the side in an empty box.

“Pathetic,” Lan Wangji says nonchalantly, turning his attention to Wei Wuxian. In an instant, the seal was broken, and Wei Wuxian's face returned to normal as he coughed.

“Hah, I felt so suffocated!” He pants. “Oi! Lan Zhan! I truly felt compelled to apologize! Why are you acting this way? Alright, that night was clearly fault. I was wrong, okay? I shouldn't have jumped over the wall in the first place. I should not have consumed alcohol. I should not have fought you. Are you happy now?”

“Yeah, I really am annoying.” Wei Wuxian whispers sheepishly.

“More words, and you’ll copy that again.” Lan Wangji says calmly. Wei Wuxian gapes and turns away from him, pouting.

“I assumed Wei Wuxian copied a lot more than that,” Mianmian says, giggling in her seat.

“Knowing him, maybe since he can’t behave for a moment.” Jiang Wanyin responds, though Mianmian's question may have been rhetorical.

Then, the surroundings slowly dims into night. Inside the library, Lan Wanji is sitting properly, continuing to copy the texts, while Wei Wuxian is laying on the floor with a soft glow of candle light on the table.

The surroundings brightened up again, and the text *'One month later'* flashed on the screen.

“Woah, we’re time-skipping?” Zizhen says.

“Well, you can see that.” A Jiang disciple says.

On the screen, young Wei Wuxian is writing on the table, smiling. Across the room is Lan Wangji standing, holding one book on hand. When Wei Wuxian approaches him, Lan Wangji turns to him.

He laughs and says, “Lan-gongzi, it’s been a month; I won’t be coming tomorrow. This is my farewell gift to you.”

Wei Wuxian thrust the paper in front of Lan Wangji’s face. Lan Wangji's eyes widened in surprise when he saw what was on the paper. It was a drawing of himself, sitting beautifully and elegantly, holding a book. He is that ethereal in Wei Wuxian's eyes.

Wei Wuxian nods vigorously, “Mn! Lan-er-gege is really handsome!”

Lan Wangji’s ears and heart might as well explode now.

“Wow, Senior Wei t-that’s—”

“Wei Wuxian really captures Lan Wangji's beauty very well,” a female cultivator comments, gaping at the drawing.

“He's a master of six arts; drawing anyone is a piece of cake for him,” A man responds to her. He may not like Wei Wuxian, but he acknowledges talent.

“Wei-xiong, can you draw me?” Nie Huaisang grins, hoping that his friend will say yes, but knowing him, he will probably ask something in return.

Wei Wuxian smirks, “Four bottles of Emperor’s Smile.”

“Deal.”

Lan Qiren sighs tiredly. It's pointless to chastise Wei Wuxian at this point. He and Lan Wangji are frequently breaking the rules. Qingheng-jun feels sorry for his brother.

“A-Ying, let’s share.” Cangse Sanren pipes in, and Wei Wuxian happily nods.

Glancing away from the drawing to look at Wei Wuxian who is happily grinning at him, Lan Wangji closes the book of Poems by Lan An and sets it aside. Wei Wuxian follows his movement, then smirks.

“He’s up to something, is he?” Madam Lan couldn't help but ask. Despite the fact that he is unfamiliar with Wei Wuxian, she appears to have a sense of his personality.

“He's Wei Wuxian, he's always up to something,” Wen Qing politely interjects, and Madam Lan giggles while Wei Wuxian pouts at Wen Qing.

“Qing-jieeee..”

“Don't whine at me, Wei Wuxian."

“Fine, I'll just whine at Shijie,” he says before turning to Yanli, and before he can even whine, Jiang Wanyin is staring at him, raising a brow.

Lan Wangji then took the paper from Wei Wuxian’s hand and momentarily freezes. In the drawing, there was a flower in his hair. Lan Wangji was not able to see this minor detail as Wei Wuxian had purposefully hid it with his index finger.

"You're ridiculous," Jin Ling says, rolling his eyes.

“Hey, Lan Zhan looks more beautiful with a flower in his hair,” Wei Wuxian turns to a smiling Lan Xichen. “Don’t you think so, Zewu-jun?”

“I concur with Wei-gongzi.”

“See?!”

“That is still ridiculous.” Jiang Wanyin says. Behind him, Jiang Fengmian chuckles.

Wei Wuxian burst out laughing, slapping his thighs. “Is the gift your liking, Lan-gongzi?”

Lan Wangji scoffs, “Pathe—”

“’Pathetic’ again, am I right?” He cuts him off. “Can't you come up with some new words?” He inquired, his gaze slowly shifting to the book Lan Wangji had set aside earlier.

“Extremely pathetic,” Lan Wangji responds stiffly. Then, Lan Wangji moves to get the book he read earlier, and when he opens it, his eyes widen in horror, and throws the book on the ground as if it were burning him. The screen zooms in, allowing viewers to see what's inside the book. Wei Wuxian had replaced Book of Lan An's Poems with an erotic cut-sleeve book.

“What the hell, Wei Wuxian?!” Yu Ziyuan exclaims, her face flushed with rage and embarrassment.

“Shameless!” Lan Qiren, whose nose is now bleeding, exclaims as well.

“I’m sorry!” Wei Wuxian bows. (He wasn’t really sorry though.)

Cangse Sanren bursts out laughing as Wei Changze tries to calm her down. Seriously, their son is such a menace!

Jiang Wanyin groans tiredly, his face flushed. Many cultivators were shocked; some had their faces buried in their hands out of embarrassment, while others—particularly perverts—were

too preoccupied with gazing at the book in lust, which is very disgusting. Some also choked, disgusted by what they'd witnessed.

“So shameless!”

“Oh lord..”

“How did Hanguang-jun not kill him on the spot?!”

Shouts rang out from the temples.

“W-Why is Senior Wei like this?” Zizhen stammers, his face on fire.

“Ugh, you know the answer to that, Zizhen.” Sizhui responds, his head lowered.

“I don’t, Sizhui; give me an answer.”

“Stop bothering him like that, Zizhen.” Jingyi reprimands, whose head is lowered as well.

Wei Wuxian felt a twinge of embarrassment right now, "God, this is only the beginning; they will shout even louder later," he said, burying his face in his hand and shaking his head.

Lan Wangji responds, "Let them be." Which basically means, *‘Allow them to yell; they'll tire of it later.’*

Lan Wangji takes a step back, trembling with rage as Wei Wuxian laughs even louder.

“Wei Ying!”

“Yes! I’m here!” Wei Wuxian says cheerily as he collapses to the floor.

“You—!” His gaze shifts to the side, where his sword, Bichen, hangs from a pillar. Lan Wangji quickly grabs it and unsheathes it. The sound of the sword unsheathing caused Wei Wuxian to come to a halt and sit up abruptly.

“Huh?!”

“You’re so dead, Senior Wei!” A couple of disciples laughed.

“What did Wangji do to deserve this?” Lan Qiren mutters to himself, pitying his nephew. Lan Xichen is simply delighted to see his brother in this state.

Wei Wuxian stands up and grabs the book as he runs away from Lan Wangji, then snatches Suibian from the table.

“That’s Wei Wuxian’s sword?” Jin Ling squints. Surprisingly, the sword looks really good. The sword complements Wei Wuxian very well, he thinks.

“It's strange seeing him with a sword,” Jingyi observes, and Zizhen nods.

“But Senior Wei sword looks better than I imagined,” Sizhui says with a smile. Behind them, Wen Ning and Wen Qing’s head were lowered. Wei Wuxian sighs at the sight of his sword. He hadn't held his own sword in a long time. He misses using it in fighting and flying, but he does not regret abandoning his sword path. Knowing how his husband is feeling right now, Lan Wangji kisses his forehead softly.

“Manners, Lan-er-gongzi! Mind your manners! If we fight here, would the library Pavilion be fine?”

“So you were considering fighting inside the library? How ridiculous!” Jiang Wanyin gives Wei Wuxian a cold stare.

“Jiang Cheng, you sound like Lan Zhan just now.” He smirks.

“Shut up!”

“You—!” Lan Wangji's hand trembles with rage. "What kind of person are you?!”

“A man, obviously!”

“Shameless!” Lan Wangji’s ears and cheeks turned bright red.

“It's just some erotic art," he says as he holds up the book. “Every man would’ve seen it. Don’t tell me you’ve never seen it before?”

He paused for a second, and seeing that Lan Wangji had not responded, he momentarily looked down at the book.

“So you’ve never—“

"Shut up! You're really—shameless!" he exclaimed for the first time, spiritual energy gathering around him.

“What were you thinking?! Lans don’t have or read books like that, Wei Wuxian!” Jin Ling scolds, embarrassed for him.

"Like I said, every man would've seen it, so I assumed he had as well," Wei Wuxian says, crossing his arms and pouting.

"Wei Wuxian, we're talking about Gusu Lan Sect here," Jin Zixuan couldn't help but add. Wei Wuxian grumbles, acknowledging his point but refusing to admit it. He swears none of these cultivators will believe him if he says his husband has a large collection of erotic books in the Jingshi.

"T-This is the first time I've heard Hanguang-jun raised his voice." Jingyi says, staring at the screen in awe.

"And this so worked up as well." Sizhui adds. He had been raised by Zewu-jun and Hanguang-jun since he was a child, and he had never seen Hanguang-jun so enraged, or yelled at someone in his entire life. Seeing him like this feels like a curse for some reason. Really, Senior Wei has the ability to elicit such emotions from Hanguang-jun.

Swinging his sword, Bichen, a spiritual energy was released, sending the papers flying through the air.

"Calm down, Lan-gongzi! Calm down! Unsanctioned duels are strictly prohibited in the Cloud Recesses!"

"Oh, now you're reprimanding him." Nie Mingjue says, rolling his eyes as Nie Huaisang laughs.

Then Wei Wuxian looks up, realizing that the book has also been tossed into the air as well. Lan Wangji and Wei Wuxian leap to get the book. Together, they reached for and grabbed the book, slamming it onto the table. The library shook as the remaining papers in the air had fallen to the floor.

"That was beautiful!" Nie Huaisang claps causing the cultivators to flinch.

“Oh my..” Wei Changze massaged his temples. Why is his son like this?

Lan Wangji growls, "Let go."

"I really like it when you're angry," Wei Wuxian says flirtatiously into Lan Wangji's reddening ears.

"Behave yourself, Wei Ying."

“Why?” Wei Wuxian wonders. “Didn't you say you didn't want to read it? Oh~, so you want to take a look.” He then smirks mischievously, "You're not speaking from the heart."

Lan Wangji was still trembling, unable to contain his anger any longer, “I'm. Not. Looking.”

“So, what's the point of grabbing it?” Wei Wuxian inquired once more. "Are you planning on giving it to Old Man Lan? No, I mean your uncle.” The screen now focused on Lan Wangji, who was gritting his teeth. “Please don't do it! What if he suspects you of having read it? Wouldn’t you be greatly embarrassed?”

Lan Wangji rises to his feet, “You—!”

“I would not suspect Wangji at all.” Lan Qiren deadpanned. Really, his poor nephew had dealt with someone whose personality was too far from himself. Why did he send him there at all if his nephew dislikes meeting new people?

“Whose book is it, anyway?” Jiang Fengmian inquires, and Nie Huaisang quickly ducks behind Wen Ning, who is now staring at him with a puzzled expression.

“Nie Huaisang,” Jiang Wanyin and Wei Wuxian respond simultaneously.

“Huisang!” Nie Mingjue exclaims, scandalized, as strides over to get Nie Huaisang and maybe just strangle him here. Wen Ning, who is in front of Huaisang, shakes in place, unsure whether he wants to help Sect Leader Nie or let his older brother handle him. Then he turns to ask her sister, Wen Qing, for help.

“Jiejie..”

“All because of you—, I—!“

“What are you stuttering about?” Wei Wuxian rises to his feet as well as both begin tugging on the book. “Lan-er-gongzi is a true gentleman, a shining pearl of the world. Scholarly on the outside, while eros flutters within.” As a result of the tugging, the book was now ripped, but Wei Wuxian continues, “Learning avidly with diligence, sitting upright like a pine tree. If your elders find out about this—” Lan Wangji's spiritual energy surged as he channelled it to his hand, which ripped the book to shreds.

“Sometimes I wonder why Lan Wangji married you, Wei Wuxian," Jiang Wanyin says, eliciting a chuckle from Yanli.

"Love, A-Cheng," she responds, and Wei Wuxian vigorously nods.

“How could Wei Wuxian not irritate you, Mother?” Jin Ling couldn't help but inquire. His Mother is lovely and kind, but when he tries to imagine a scene in which Jiang Yanli chastises Wei Wuxian for getting into trouble, he can't see it happening. He believes Jiang Yanli has never been angry in her entire life—frustrated maybe.

“Well, he was like that as a child, and I am used to seeing him causing trouble, and I love him. He's my good and sweet little brother.” Jiang Yanli smiles as he turns to look over Wei Wuxian, who is now grinning at her like a fool. Yu Ziyuan was opposed to Jiang Yanli's answer, but did not voice it.

“Aww, shijie, I'm going to cry.”

Jiang Wanyin sighs, “Stop being dramatic, Wei Wuxian.”

“Huh, aiya, that was a fine book of erotic art, how could you shred it?” He says, amused by Lan Wangji's rage. Then he turns away from the second jade. "You clean that up; I'm not going to help."

“Get lost.”

Gasps erupted in the temple. Did they hear Lan Wangji right? Did he really say that?

“Oh my goodness. H-Hanguang-jun, he—” Jingyi breathes out.

“I know.” Zizhen interrupts him, gaping at the screen.

“I wouldn't believe this if I didn't see it,” Jin Zixuan had his eyes widened in shocked.

“I mean, if Wei Wuxian annoyed me like that I would’ve said the same thing,” An unknown cultivator says.

“What? Get lost?” He turns back to Lan Wangji. “You actually said 'get lost,’” Wei Wuxian says as he approaches him. “Oh my, Lan Zhan, they all say you're righteous and courtly, well-versed in fine etiquette, but look at you now! Aiya..”

Lan Wangji clenched his fists and turned back to Wei Wuxian, “GET LOST!”

“GET LOST!”

Another voice overlapped Lan Wangji's and many cultivators paused, perplexed. While Lan Wangji's yelled in anger, the other voice yelled in anguish. Lan Xichen, Lan Wangji, and Wei Wuxian froze.

"Whose voice was that?" Wei Changze asks curiously.

Jiang Wanyin and Jin Ling were at the Guanyin Temple when Lan Xichen revealed Lan Wangji's yearning and suffering. Both of them glanced at Wei Wuxian. Hearing himself reject Lan Wangji this way must be shocking and heart-breaking.

"Lan Zhan, I'm here…Baobei, listen to me, I'm here." He could feel his husband's body trembling, though it was subtle. He should be concerned because, while the scenes are not particularly that dark yet, there will be a lot of arguing between them in the next few scenes. He's not sure if he can bear seeing his past self reject his husband like this, but he'll do his best to comfort him.

"Mn, stay," Lan Wangji says shakily, and Wei Wuxian nods.

"Yes, always."

The scene then darkened into night. The cultivators were permitted to see a beautiful, tranquil lake.

"Caiyi Town of Gusu, Biling."

"So we're back here now." Lan Xichen mumbles, his smile fading.

A boat sat in the middle of the lake, with a lantern on the side providing light in such a dark setting. The fisherman yawns, but the fishing rod moves suddenly as it catches something from below. But then the lake became slightly turbulent.

“Huh?!” The fisherman exclaimed, perplexed and startled. Whatever was caught on the hook caused the fisherman to struggle to pull. He used all his strength, yet could not pull it up at all. From the view from the sky, the unknown creature began to circle around the boat, spinning it in the process.

Jingyi frowns, “That’s the thing from before, right?”

“It seems so.” Sizhui says stiffly.

“T-This is—!”

He continues to pull and pull, but because of the strength of the unknown creature, the wooden fishing rod snapped.

“Ah!” The fisherman exclaimed as he was thrown back. He hadn't expected his fishing rod to snap. The fishes in Caiyi Lake were of average size, but this unknown creature he caught just now was enormous that a wooden fishing rod was not enough to pull it up. The man looks around, breathing heavily and shakily. When he notices that the unknown creature has vanished, he looks down at his rugged hands.

“What’s that thing under the waters?” He asked himself nervously. He jerked when bubbles popped in the waters.

“Poor man, he just wants to catch some fish.” A female cultivator said, lifting her sleeve to her mouth, pitying the man.

“The Wens are really terrible driving that thing downstream,” a man said, shaking his head, his face contorted with anger.

“Imagine how many people were attacked by that thing.”

“Huh?!”

More bubbles popped, and the fisherman could only stare in horror, fearful that the unknown creature would attack him soon, but instead, a corpse resurfaced, followed by more and more corpses.

The screams of the fishermen filled the air, and the screen slowly dims.

A lot of cultivators sucked in a breath. It was unsettling to see so many corpses in the lake. It took days before Lan Xichen and the others to investigate the lake. The Clan Leader did learn from the town that a large number of people had mysteriously vanished. Many people claimed that the water ghouls were to blame for the disappearance of so many people, which he and the elders believed. Oh, how wrong they were to believe that.

“That's all for now. Another scene will appear in a minute, so please relax yourselves,” Baoshan Sanren says, not bothering to look at the cultivators as her attention was focused on her crystal ball.

“Father, you said you retreated before, right?” Jin Ling inquires of his father. “Who suppressed that that thing?”

“It was the elders,” Jin Zixuan responded.

“I can't believe that fucking Su She was saved by an idiot,” mutters Jiang Wanyin. Wei Wuxian heard him and scoffed softly. What exactly was he supposed to do? Watch him drown and die? If he had known how that man would turn out in the future, Wei Wuxian could have left that man to die.

“Su Shit was there?!” Jingyi exclaims.

“Jingyi!”

“I apologize, Grandmaster Lan!”

“Yes, you'll see what happens in Caiyi Lake in the next scene,” Lan Xichen sighs, half used to the disciple's cursing.

“I can't wait to see him drown,” Jingyi grins, as some cultivators shudder. To think this child is a Lan, truly a menace. Did the Lans somehow found this child in the street and said, *‘We’re going to adopt you. From now on, you’re a Lan.’*

“Don’t make that face, you’re terrifying.” Jin Ling says, trembling a bit.

“That was evil, Jingyi. Say it again.” Zizhen, too, smirked.

“Wei Wuxian,” Baoshan Sanren says, and the cultivators turn their attention to her and Wei Wuxian. “Your theory about resentful energy has piqued my interest. Have you really considered this way back then?” She inquired calmly. Some cultivators were grateful for this question because they, too, were curious.

“Funny thing is I only thought of that on spot,” he responds. While he considered making tools before expending resentful energy, that theory was not one of them.

“Don’t joke with us, you clearly thought of it be—”

Lan Wangji effectively silenced the man.

“I'm impressed,” said Baoshan Sanren, and Wei Wuxian smiled. It was strange to hear someone praise him, especially when it came from a powerful person, yet it warmed him.

“How come you're praising him?! Wei Wuxian—”

“Are you then worthy of praise then?” Baoshan Sanren cocks her brow as an intimidating gesture, and it effectively worked seeing how the man shut up. “As a person who has lived for hundreds of years, I have studied not only spiritual energy, but also resentful energy.”

Except for Cangse Sanren and Wei Wuxian, many people's eyes widened in surprise. While studying under the immortal, she mentioned resentful energy several times to Cangse Sanren, and that’s how she got the idea that her Master might be studying resentful energy. She wasn't opposed to it, but she did wonder why her master wanted to study it when she could focus on spiritual energy instead. Wei Wuxian, on the other hand, was taken aback.

“If you have studied resentful energy,” Wei Wuxian paused, and a lot of cultivators anticipated his question. “Then, will grandmaster teach this humble one—“

"Yes, Wei Wuxian,” she replied immediately.

“Immortal! Why are you studying resentful energy?! You have seen what it did to Wei Wuxian!” A brave cultivator exclaims.

"No one had attempted to study it, so I did. Resentful energy isn't all that bad, you see,” the immortal said, a ball of resentful energy in her hand, and the cultivators took a step back. It was only a small ball, but the power it contained was mind-boggling. “Cultivators can benefit from the use of resentful energy. For instance, Wei Wuxian's creations: the Spirit-Attraction Flag, the Compass of Evil (III Winds), and the Stygian Tiger Amulet. It is only harmful when you allow it to take control of you, when it is driven by emotions, or simply when you are unable to control it,” Baoshan Sanren explains, her face neutral.

“But Wei Wuxian went insane in the Nightless City—”

“As I previously stated, it is only harmful, especially when motivated by emotions. In the Nightless City, Wei Wuxian was grieving and provoked.”

There was a pregnant pause as cultivators deliberated over her words. The ball of resentful energy vanished from her grasp, and the screen came to life.

“Sit still, the next scene is here.”

Chapter End Notes

So, I just made a WangXian fanart 4 days ago and now it is finished. Spyxfamily X MDZS? Hell yeah! I made that fanart using Ibis Paint because your author can't pay for Procreate.

Waterborne Abyss

Chapter Notes

This fic is longer than my will to live.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“Immortal, this humble one wishes to ask,” a female cultivator inquired as Baoshan Sanren turned to face her and nodded. “How come you didn't bring everyone back? There’s still Jin Guangshan, Jin Guangyao, or maybe Xue Yang?”

“I would not like those two to be brought back,” Madam Jin says. His husband was a despicable jerk, as was his son, Jin Guangyao. To be honest, she was relieved that the immortal did not bring them back, but this woman inquired, and now perhaps the immortal will reconsider. Xue Yang, however, she hadn't known him for long, but she knows he's another wuss that his husband, or perhaps Jin Guangyao, had taken in.

“Let’s not bother the dead, alright?” An unknown cultivator says, tensing a little.

“Good question, but I don't want to bring those evil people back, though I am willing to bring some back, my student Xiao Xingchen, his friend Song Lan, and the little girl A-Qing,” With this, the juniors smiled and squealed. If either of them wishes that they be brought back, will they be able to see A-Qing as a living person rather than a ghost? Just thinking about it, makes them ecstatic. Cangse Sanren, on the other hand, was taken aback. She had never met Xiao Xingchen, but her master may have taken him in after she died. She would like to know her master’s other disciple.

“If you want me to bring them back, I might need one of Wei Wuxian's Time-Travel Talismans.” Baoshan Sanren turns to Wei Wuxian.

“Ah, I only brought one talisman, but if someone will offer me a brush and a talisman, I can make one,” he says and the juniors hastily hand him talismans.

“Take mine, Senior Wei!”

“No! Take mine!”

Lan Wangji's lips lift slightly as Wei Wuxian laughs fondly. He won't say it, but he thinks the juniors are cute.

“The disciples adore Wei-gongzi,” Lan Xichen observes, earning a nod from Lan Wangji. Wei Wuxian was looking at the juniors, who were now debating which talisman he should take, but among them was Jin Ling, who was looking down and holding a talisman as well. He looks like he’s contemplating whether or not to give his talisman to him. Yanli and Jin Zixuan were encouraging him. Whether or not this warmed Wei Wuxian's heart, he chooses not to mention it and walks through the sea of disciples and kneels in front of Jin Ling.

“A-Ling, would you like to offer this humble one your talisman?” He smiles, staring fondly at his nephew, whose cheeks have begun to turn pink.

“I only have one, so don't mess with it!” He exclaims, embarrassed, as he hands the talisman to Wei Wuxian. Wei Wuxian accepts it with a chuckle. He gets to his feet, ruffles his hair, and walks back to his husband's side. The disciples were disappointed that their Senior had accepted Jin Ling's talisman, which made Wei Wuxian laugh even more. Why are these disciples so adorable? He thinks. “Keep those talismans; I'll accept them later if I need more,” He says and the disciples’ expression brightened once more.

“They really love him, huh?” her heart melting at the sight before her. “He takes your affection for children, Changze.”

“Yes,” he agrees as he kisses his wife's brow.

Wei Wuxian then turns to Baoshan Sanren, “I do not have a brush,” Wei Wuxian admits sheepishly.

“Worry not, I will hand you one later. Keep the talisman with you; the screen will lit up any moment.”

The cultivators then relaxes. Some of them were whispering, most likely discussing the recent scenes. For the time being, cultivators have stopped talking about Wei Wuxian, which is a good thing because he desperately needs a break.

“Wei-gongzi, I would like to ask, how did you come up with the Time-Travelling Talisman?” Qingheng-jun inquires.

“I just thought about it,” He responded and paused.

Originally, he wanted to create a talisman intended to send someone to the past to correct their mistakes and maybe use it for himself, but he did not pursue that concept. He came to a realization he is gradually accepting his past mistakes, and is quite content with what he has right now. And besides, if he really did pursue that concept, managed to travel to the past and correct his mistakes, then what? Would that make a difference? No. He still died and was despised by the cultivation world. The pain and suffering would remain within his mind and heart, so he sticks to his second concept of bringing tools from the past to the present. It's not fancy, but it's still good.

“Though Cloud Recesses does not have any books with time-travel content. I went town to town to look for one and only found one book. I read and studied it before creating the talisman with which a person can travel back in time to retrieve tools and bring them to the present time. Don’t you think it’s interesting?” Wei Wuxian smiles and Qingheng-jun nods. It was indeed interesting.

“Rather than retrieving tools from the past, why not create another talisman that brings a person to the past?” Nie Huaisang asked, and this piqued the cultivator’s interest.

Wei Wuxian shrugs and crosses his arms, “I did consider that idea, but I did not pursue it. If a person desires to travel to the past and change certain events, there will be unique dangers and risks, which will contradict the future and create a paradox. That’s why this time-travelling of mine has limitations. If the talisman is used, you will only have 3 minutes to time-travel and retrieve the tool you want; go beyond that time and you will be dragged out

immediately. Another is, if you intend to use the talisman for other reasons, you will also be extracted from the array instantly."

Truly a genius, a prodigy even at a young age. The cultivators began murmuring once again. They were really intrigued by Wei Wuxian's talisman, and this is the issue, he's the Yiling Patriarch, the cruel and wicked demon in the cultivation world. His ability to create both useful and impossible inventions is truly amazing. Even those who despise him recognize his intelligence and talents, but they are primarily jealous. *'How does he do this?'* They all thought simultaneously. Jiang Fengmian was proud of him, while Yu Ziyuan scowled, trying not to acknowledge the pride growing within her. He truly is the Jiang Sect's head disciple, living up to their motto *'attempt the impossible.'*

The juniors' and Lan Wangji's admiration of Wei Wuxian deepened. Baoshan Sanren smiled during his explanation, there was finally someone who could compete with her in terms of intelligence. Maybe they can talk more about resentful energy and exchange theories someday.

Cangse Sanren and Wei Changze couldn't believe what they were hearing, but they were proud that their son had created such a complex, yet intriguing talisman. Wei Changze knows that her son inherited her wife's intelligence. They really need to see his son's inventions.

"Could he get any smarter than this?" Jingyi asks, his eyes twinkling.

Zizhen's body shook with excitement, he could not stop himself from grinning, "I would trust every talisman Senior Wei created."

"Me too," Sizhui says, staring at his Xian-gege. Wen Qing laughed as he saw his cousin's fond expression.

"Wei Wuxian made a lot of useful talismans while we were still at the Burial Mounds. I will not say this to him, but he really is incredible."

Wen Ning could not help but turn to Sizhui and said, "O-One time while you were in the Demon Slaughtering Cave, you almost chewed Wei-gongzi's talisman, and he almost got

angry.”

Sizhui's cheeks flushed as he realized what his uncle had just said, “Oh my god, I did?!”

Jingyi laughs, “I can already picture baby Sizhui doing that! Oh, that’s so adorable!”

“Jingyi, please stop laughing.“

“Don’t worry, your adorableness saved you from his anger.” Wen Qing said, recalling scolding Wei Wuxian for making his cousin cry and immediately apologizing.

“I can’t believe he’s both obnoxious and smart,” Nie Mingjue comments.

“I'd like him if he's well-behaved like the others,” Lan Qiren whispers, which Lan Xichen hears.

“He’s still Cangse-gaoji’s son, Uncle.”

Lan Qiren sighs exasperatedly, “Yes, and that's the problem.”

“I wish I was as intelligent as him,” Jin Zixuan sighs, closing his eyes and slumping.

“Everyone is intelligent in their own way, Zixuan,” Yanli says, shaking her head.

“Well, yeah, but he's a different breed of genius.”

Yanli didn't say anything and just laughed. His husband is indeed right.

The screen lits up again and the cultivators relaxed.

There was a bright, clear lake. Some leaves languidly fall to the clear water. Seconds later, a boat passed through the water, and a bustling town came into existence. The cultivators could see the tall bridge with a tunnel through which the boats could pass, and the tall, beautiful mountains. It was Caiyi Town.

Then, there was a pleasant sigh in the background, "Bridges riding over the stream, houses resting by the river, Caiyi Town is worthy of its name." Nie Huaisang says, smiling and fluttering his fan, before snapping it shut as a laugh vibrated through the screen. Nie Huaisang looks around for the source of the laughter.

Lan Wangji smiled as he heard his husband laugh. It was full of life, one of the best things he'd ever heard, and he wanted to hear it forever—committing himself to being the source of his happiness, smiles, and laughter.

Wei Wuxian sighs, "What a stroke of luck with heaven on my side!" Because of his loudness, Jin Zixuan scoffs at him and Jiang Wanyin, who are sitting at a table nearby, before walking away.

Wei Wuxian groans involuntarily, "I'm glad I didn't see you like that or I would've punched you."

"You were loud, okay? It was a little annoying," Jin Zixuan admits, despite his entire expression and body cringing.

"I wasn't; you just don't like me."

"You, too, dislike me. The feeling is mutual," Jin Zixuan rolls his eyes and returns his attention to the scream, completely ignoring Wei Wuxian, who stuck his tongue out to him while Yanli chuckles. These two really are so cute. She can't wait for them to get along in the future.

Jiang Wanyin, who was watching their interaction, was feeling slightly amused, and Jin Ling? He facepalmed. The way his father acted on the screen was similar to Jingyi being so loud and annoying that he would scoff and walk away just to get away from him for a moment. He really is Jin Zixuan's son.

"The little prude is busy exorcising, while the old prude is at the Nie Clan discussion conference. When good fortune strikes, it is unstoppable!" Wei Wuxian takes a scoop of his ice cream and happily eats it.

Lan Qiren ignored several snorts in the background, even his own nephew Lan Xichen and brother laughed at him, while his other nephew simply smiled, not because of Wei Wuxian's remark, but because of his husband's childish smile.

"Luck?" Jiang Wanyin asked dubiously, his chin resting on his palm. "You've offended the whole Lan Clan. After Old Man Lan returns, nobody will bury your corpse."

This made everyone uneasy because, contrary to what Jiang Wanyin claimed, no one truly bothered to bury Wei Wuxian's body. However, there had been rumors that his powers had backfired during the siege and he was torn to fine powder by his own army, so who would bother burying ashes instead? Lan Wangji, in retrospect, would. Jiang Wanyin, disgusted with himself, let himself be eaten by his own guilt.

Wei Wuxian huffs quietly; it was devoid of humour. Who would have guessed his brother's words would come true?

"You've already buried my corpse so many times, what's wrong with once more? Besides, who cares what happens after death?"

"A-Xian..." Yanli says, her voice tinged with concern. The same can be said for Wei Wuxian's parents, who stared at their son's back. Jiang Wanyin feels heavy. That question hurts; he never buried Wei Wuxian's body or ashes after the siege. He was so filled with rage and hatred that he no longer cared what happened to him after that, but he will not lie about the loss and grief he felt when he realized he had lost his last family. He wants to get rid of

the heavy feeling that is engulfing him, It's drowning him that he feels like he can no longer breathe, but what can he do?

Wei Wuxian suddenly thought of what his past self just said. Originally, he did not care what happens to him after death; he lived a happy life, so why ask for more? But Lotus Pier fell, and he gave away his core to his brother, and he began caring a little more about his own life, but being him, he cared more about the lives of others than his own. The Wens, whom he tried to protect in any way he could, died awfully. His sister died in the Nightless City. The realization that he was losing people who truly cared about him and knew his heart,

He went insane.

Cultivators led a siege to the Burial Mounds. He tried to fight them, but what was the point of fighting back? The world was so cruel to him. Everybody despised him so much that he had enough of life. He desired to rest and then simply vanish permanently. He had no one to protect, no one to protect him, so who cares what happens to him before and after death? No one. No one will bother to build an ancestral hall for him or light incense for him. Instead, they will scream and flaunt to the heavens of their victory over the Yiling Patriarch.

Wei Wuxian releases a heavy sigh Lan Wangji recognized that heavy sigh and knew exactly what he’s feeling. He kissed his husband on the cheek and drew him in closer.

Perhaps not all cultivators desired his death. His husband, the great Lan Wangji, Hanguang-jun, The Chief Cultivator, wished for his survival, to protect him from anyone else, and he is so grateful for the opportunity to live again.

“Seize the day before then! It’s a bright spring day, a crispy ice dessert with rich milk incense lies before us, why not just indulge?” He says happily, taking another scoop of the ice cream.

“You’re like a gluttonous ghost who’ve never had this before.”

“But the Cloud Recesses doesn’t provide decent food. If I can enjoy such delicacy every day, I wouldn’t mind staying a few months longer in Gusu.**”**

Lan Qiren made an offended noise and spun around to glare at Wei Wuxian. “Excuse me? Doesn’t provide decent food? Foods with minimal spices are already decent!” He declares, drawing laughter from the audience.

“Well, let's be honest, Uncle, our food is a bit bland,” Lan Xichen says, smiling as if he did not just say that straightforwardly. yet he dared to continue, “Though, having such delicacy as that might allow the disciples to enjoy Cloud Recesses more.” He suggests, and the Lan disciples feel as if they should worship their Zewu-jun from now on.

“He’s right, Qiren. A little bit of change won’t hurt.” Qingheng-jun teases a bit while Madam Lan chuckles.

“You both are so—!”

Wei Wuxian sighs, “Those who grew up eating this dessert are so fortunate.”

The disciples and Wei Wuxian concurs.

“Forget it. If you’re punished to copy for another month, you’ll definitely escape faster than rabbits.”

Scoffing, Wei Wuxian leaned across the table and stuck his tongue out at his brother.

Jiang Yanli and Nie Huaisang both sigh. It's unfortunate that these brothers were once so close. They both look fine at the moment, but anyone can see how they can be awkward with each other at times. Both of them, still filled with dread, uncertainty, and tension.

Jiang Fengmian and Yu Ziyuan locked their gaze on the screen. They're not stupid; despite the teasing, both of them noticed the tension after they were brought back. That has happened a lot in the past when both brothers argued, but not to this extent. They suddenly wondered

what happened after the fall of Lotus Pier, what happened to them both to make them the way they are now.

Zizhen snorts, “Senior Wei is such a child.”

“He's always been that way,” Jingyi said, rolling his eyes.

“When Wei-gongzi wants to tease A-Yuan, he always sticks his tongue out,” Wen Ning cheerfully shares. Perhaps it wasn't just A-Yuan, but him and his sister as well. Wei Wuxian sometimes does that when his sister scolds him for being such a stubborn idiot, and Wen Ning knows that, despite his sister cringing, she very fond of him.

“I was tempted to cut his tongue out before,” Wen Qing says solemnly, causing the disciples near her to take a step back.

“Are you secretly Xue Yang?!” Jingyi exclaimed, shocked.

If Jin Ling was near him, he would without a doubt slap him.

“Who the hell is that?” said Wen Qing, her brow furrowed.

Then, Wei Wuxian’s lips formed a smile, “Shijie would like this ice dessert as well.”

Jiang Wanyin smiled as he hummed in agreement, nodding his head vigorously.

Jiang Yanli and a few others couldn’t help but giggle delightedly. Her brothers are really sweet. It never ceases to delight her that her brothers think of her even when she is not present. Jin Ling, who was watching his mother, smiled and returned his attention to the screen. ‘*They're brought back to this timeline to live again, right? They're not going back, are they?’* He questioned himself. It hurts just thinking about his parents disappearing again. If

the immortal allows them to leave her mountain with him, he will take his parents to this ice cream shop, he swears in the name of Buddha.

Jin Zixuan thought the same.

Then Wei Wuxian comes to a halt, sniffing the air. Smelling something familiar, he turns around, his face brightening.

“The scent of rice wine~!” He hadn't smelled the familiar scent for a while that he wanted to find out where it was. He then dashes forward and carelessly jumps into the boat.

Concerned, Jiang Wanyin reprimands, “You ran so fast that you're going to capsize it!”

“Look, Jiang Cheng, your younger self is concerned about me,” Wei Wuxian teases, while Jiang Wanyin scowls but says nothing. Of course he cares, how could he not?

“How come you're always so careless?” Jingyi speaks up, feeling both annoyed and fond.

Wei Wuxian chuckles and winks at him, “To cause trouble means to be careless.”

Because of that response, Jin Ling’s brows twitched, “That’s not—you know what, I’ll just shut up.”

Wei Wuxian immediately grabs the bamboo pole, ignoring his brother’s warning and starts to row the boat, exclaiming, “Thanks for your concern!”

On the stone bridge where Wei Wuxian's boat passed through were the Twin Jades of Gusu Lan stood.

“Brother,” Lan Wangji calls out. “Why did you bring them along? Horseplay is inappropriate during exorcisms.” He slowly turns to look at his brother’s back. “The water ghouls in Biling Lake are strange; it'll be a perilous journey ahead,” he said, his expression impassive.

“Oh, we’re going to see young Zewu-jun!”

Lan Xichen laughs as one of his disciples gleams.

The screen then shifts to the guest disciple's rooms of Gusu Lan. Outside the dorms, Nie Huaisang is running and upon arriving to his friend’s room, he slams the room’s doors open. “Wei-xiong, you really struck it lucky!”

Wei Wuxian, who was lying in his bed, slowly sat up. “Really? What’s up?” He asked.

“The old man went to our sect’s Discussion conference last night, so we don’t have classes for a few days!” Nie Huiasang says with a huge grin on his lips.

Nie Mingjue narrows his eyes as Nie Huaisang laughs nervously. It's been a long time since he's seen his younger brother so excited. He used to think his younger brother would be excited to learn how to use a sabre, but instead he's more interested in learning about traditional arts. He got mad, and they ended up arguing a lot because of it. To see this small excitement in front of him, it clenches his heart. He suddenly feels the need to do something, to earn that look from him and feel proud of himself.

Wei Wuxian smiles widely, “It's a lucky strike, almost as if heaven is blessing me with its clouds!” He beams as he puts on his boots.

Lan Qiren couldn't count the number of times he sighed, including this time. He was hesitant to leave at the time because he was afraid something—or someone—might cause trouble in the sect, but he did so because he trusted his nephew, Lan Xichen. But then again, Wei Wuxian did not cause any problems while on Caiyi. However, he did, in fact, save Su She, which he was pleased to hear about, but Su She, the person saved by Wei Wuxian, turned out to be one of the people who tried to kill him in the past.

“No wonder he was able to go in Caiyi,” Madam Jin mumbles, amused, as she casts a fleeting glance at Lan Xichen, who smiles back.

Zizhen snorts, “Wow, I can’t believe young Sect Leader Nie and Jingyi are so alike.”

“Why do you always compare me to him?!” He points to himself and Nie Huaisang, who appears amused rather than offended. “What do we have in common?!” exclaims Jingyi. Many cultivators snickered in the background, while Nie Mingjue only raised an eyebrow.

“You both like to gossip,” Jin Ling says casually, unconcerned that Nie Huaisang will get offended, or get angry. Aside from being extremely intelligent, what is he going to do, smack him with a fan? Assign someone to kill him? The latter seems unlikely. Nie Huiasang, on the other hand, appears to concur with Jin Ling's response. He's not going to deny it; he's always been that kind of person.

“But you do have one thing that the other does not.” Zizhen smirks slowly, and Jingyi suddenly does not want to hear the answer.

“What?” Nie Huaisang and Sizhui inquired simultaneously. Zizhen raises his hand and teasingly points to his temple.

Jingyi made a scandalized sound, and Nie Huaisang laughed.

Jiang Wanyin, who’s sitting on the side while cleaning his sword, speaks, “When he comes back, you’re still going to get your punishment.”

Wei Wuxian then sighs, “Yeah, yeah. Let’s go; I refuse to believe there are no pheasants on this mountain.”

“What do you hunt when they’re no pheasants?” Wei Changze wonders. Pheasants are relatively simple to hunt and catch, so about his son’s proclamation being the best pheasant hunter may be true.

“I remembered finding bunnies beneath the mountain. I considered roasting it, but they were so cute that I gave it to someone else,” Wei Wuxian responds, turning his head to smile at his husband.

“I suppose I know who that someone is.” Cangse Sanren smirks seeing his son’s cheeks turning pink. Ah, his son is so cute!

The scene shifts as the three walk together through Cloud Recesses' reception room. Then there were two people across the hallway, it was Lan Wangji and Lan Xichen.

“Oh, it’s Zewu-jun!” Jingyi beams.

"He didn't change at all,” Sizhui says, and the others agree.

“He only matured,” Zizhen adds.

Madam Lan, Qingheng-jun, and Lan Xichen giggled. He agrees that he hasn't changed much, though it's strange to see his younger self so happy, as if the only obstacle he faced was the Caiyi Lake incident.

He had forgotten how simple it is to smile. Nowadays, it appears that genuine smiles require a lot of energy, it’s frustrating. He misses his younger self's lack of problems and responsibilities, he misses his ignorance of the cultivation world's issues. He misses.....a lot.

“Huh?” Wei Wuxian stopped in his tracks and exclaimed, “There are two…..Lan Zhan —s!”

Lan Wangji's glare deepened.

A lot of cultivators burst out laughing while some were amused, and some just did not care.

"Now that you mentioned it, they do look alike when they were younger," Jiang Yanli says. She terribly finds the young twin jades so adorable that she wants to pinch their squishy cheeks.

While the two looked the same in appearance, there were several differences. Lan Wangji had amber, almost gold eyes, while Lan Xichen had cinnamon eyes. Their ambiances and facial expressions were also distinct. While one is smiling, the other is glaring. Wei Wuxian could now tell that if Lan Wangji had a stern face, the gentle one had to be the other Jade of Gusu Lan—Zewu-jun, Lan Xichen.

"Good observation, Wei-gongzi." Lan Xichen says with a smile.

Lan Wangji scrunched his brows and glared at Wei Wuxian, almost *'glowering'*. He then averted his gaze to look into the distance, while Lan Xichen smiled, "And you are...?"

The boys immediately introduced themselves and saluted in respect.

"Jiang Wanyin of Yunmeng."

"Wei Wuxian of Yunmeng."

Lan Xichen returned the salute. Behind Wei Wuxian, Nie Huaisang whispered, "Brother Xichen."

Lan Xichen turns to him "Huaisang," he began. "When I returned from Qinghe a while ago, your brother inquired about your studies: how is it? Will you be able to pass this

year?”

“How many times have you failed, Sect Leader Nie?” Jingyi asks shamelessly, and Nie Huaisang can feel his older brother's piercing gaze.

Nie Huaisang sighs exasperatedly, “A lot?”

“Even I’m not dumb enough to fail that much.” Jingyi mumbles, earning a painful slap from Sizhui, his face stern, and he wilted in place. He didn't mean to belittle him, he was only kidding! He knows Nie Huaisang could surpass him in a lot of ways.

Zizhen leans in to whisper to Jingyi’s ears, “I salute you for saying that in front of Sect Leader Nie’s older brother.”

Jin Ling attempts not to snort at him. Jingyi looks up to glance at Nie Mingjue, which turned out to be his biggest mistake in life. The sight of Nie Mingjue glaring at him made him shudder and hide behind the Ghost General. Nie Huaisang, on the other hand, was unbothered because he knew that, while he was not academically gifted, he was gifted in certain areas, and everyone knew it.

There were some cultivators who wished to voice out their opinions about Nie Huaisang’s failure, but seeing as Nie Mingjue was standing protectively near his younger brother and could easily end them right here, they decided to keep their thoughts to themselves.

“Generally speaking, yes…” Nie Huaisang responds timidly.

Wei Wuxian grins at friend and turns to Lan Xichen before asking, “Zewu-jun, what are you two going out for?”

“What, you want to go with him that badly?” Mianmian teases.

“He always wanted to be around Lan-er-gongzi.” Yanli says with a smile, glancing at his brother who is now grinning at her.

Jiang Wanyin rolls his eyes, “More like annoy him.”

“Jiang Cheng,” Wei Wuxian starts. “Keep rolling your eyes; it'll get stuck up there sooner or later.”

“Hmmp!”

“To exterminate water ghouls. We were short of hands, so I came back to find Wangji.” Lan Xichen responds.

Jin Zixuan scoffs, “Yeah right, water ghouls indeed.” Now he knows that the water ghouls they were supposed to hunt turned out to be something more dangerous and deadly.

“Brother, we don't need to engage in small talk,” Lan Wangji spoke coldly. “This matter permits no delay; it is time for us to depart.”

“Why are you always so quick to get rid of me, Er-gege?” Wei Wuxian teases and laughs seeing his husband’s pink ears.

“Don’t want you in danger,” he responds solemnly and earnestly that Wei Wuxian’s heart started began to pound loudly.

“But I can handle my own.”

“Still don’t want you in danger.”

Laughing at his husband’s protectiveness and adorableness, he kisses Lan Wangji’s cheeks and the tip of his nose.

Someone made a gagging sound, and they don't need to know who that is.

“Damn, you two, get a room.”

"A-Cheng, let them be," Jiang Fengmian said as he stood beside his son, Yu Ziyuan following. The two have been silent since the memories began, and they will remain so until there is a scene that necessitates discussion or opinion. Jiang Fengmian is a bit relieved that his wife is not lashing out right now, but he knew she would sooner or later, and they would need to talk privately later.

“Wait, wait!” Wei Wuxian hurried. “I know how to catch water ghouls. Zewu-jun, why don’t you take us along?”

Lan Xichen smiled, and behind him, Lan Wangji scowled at Wei Wuxian. “It is against the rules.”

“There’s no such rule, Wangji.” **Lan Xichen thought amusedly.**

Lan Xichen stiffens.

“Wait, Zewu-jun's mouth didn't move; does that mean it was his thoughts?” A Lan disciple points hysterically at the screen.

“That means not only Senior Wei’s thoughts will be revealed, but everyone else’s as well.” Sizhui had no problem with this, as if he had impure thoughts, but he’s concerned for everyone. What if their thoughts were dark, or indecent? Surely the immortal would not reveal such information, right?

“Well, I don't have anything to lose,” Zizhen shrugs. He'll let anyone hear his romantic thoughts, so the cultivators may as well learn from them. No other couple is as romantic as Hanguang-jun and Senior Wei nowadays.

“I don’t like this.” Jin Ling’s thoughts when he first encountered Wei Wuxian, who was Mo Xuanyu at that time, were full of cursing and insults. With his parents and grandparents present and having them to hear their son/grandson curse and insult others, he can feel his hair standing on end. He swallows a lump, bracing himself for any reprimand or punishment soon.

An unknown cultivator scowls, “What does this mean, Immortal? Why are we suddenly hearing other people's thoughts? Don't tell us—”

“What? You think it’s fair that only Wei Wuxian’s thoughts will be heard?”

“That’s not what—”

“Then what do you really mean? That it’s unfair for everyone else’s thoughts to be heard as well? Why? Are you afraid that something else will come to light in your thoughts?” Baoshan Sanren smirks, causing the unknown cultivator to take a step back, suddenly intimidated by her cold stare.

“Good, you don't have to feel guilty if you're not hiding anything,” she says, returning her gaze to the screen.

Lan Wangji stiffens in place. Does this imply that his thoughts will be heard as well, sooner or later? All his thoughts, besides the cultivation world issues, were always Wei Wuxian, and they were shameless, perverted thoughts. He is suddenly tempted to leave this temple. His parents, brother and uncle would be so disappointed with him. Wei Wuxian, on the other hand, seemed pleased.

“Husband, I am ready to hear your thoughts,” Wei Wuxian says softly into his ears.

“We're not,” Jiang Wanyin responds unconsciously, his face contorted in disgust, but Wei Wuxian knows it's not entirely disgust.

“Jiang Cheng, you know, Wen Qing is right over—”

“Shut up!”

“How is it against the rules?” He inquires before explaining. “We used to catch water ghouls all the time in Yunmeng. Besides, we don’t have classes these days anyways.” Wei Wuxian shrugs.

“That's right, Zewu-jun, we'd definitely be of assistance,” Jiang Wanyin says quickly.

Yu Ziyuan and Jiang Fengmian's lips quirk up slightly.

“It is not necessary.” Lan Wangji immediately disagrees. “The Gusu Lan Sect is also—”

“Sure, then.” Lan Xichen interrupted. “Many thanks for your help.”

The cultivators burst out laughing seeing the betrayed look of young Lan Wangji. It was that moment Lan Wangji’s face expressed so much emotion.

“Oh my god, Hanguang-jun is so adorable!”

“I know right?”

A female cultivator smirks, "Zewu-jun just knows what he's doing."

“Make some preparations, and we'll leave together,” Lan Xichen says before turning to Nie Huaisang. “Huaisang, are you also coming?” he asks.

Nie Huaisang responds, “I'll just tag along to Caiyi.”

“This is why you don’t pass. You don’t study!” Nie Mingjue chastises.

“Da-ge! It is exhausting to study all the time!” Nie Huaisang whines, and he supposes his younger brother is right. He did pressure him a lot in the past. Nie Mingue huffs in response.

“Alright, let's go prepare!” exclaims Wei Wuxian, wrapping his arms around Jiang Wanyin and Nie Huaisang's shoulders. They couldn't contain their excitement as they made their way back to their dorms.

The screen went black, and the scene returned to Caiyi town, with the focus on Lan Xichen's back.

“Oh, we’re back now.”

“I can't wait to see some action,” a Nie disciple squeals in excitement.

“Me too!” exclaims one of Jiang's disciples.

“The head disciple and only son of Clan Leader Jiang are well-known in Yunmeng, and they're likely to know more than horseplay,” Lan Xichen responds softly.

Jiang Yanli and Jiang Fengmian hummed in agreement, while Yu Ziyuan simply agrees silently. Jiang Wanyin finds it strange to see his parents looking proud of him, but it's exactly what he needed to see, and it warmed his heart.

Lan Xichen turns completely to face his brother, "Also, didn't you wish for *him* to come along? You look as if you wanted the *head disciple* of Clan Leader Jiang to come along. That's why I agreed."

Lan Wangji was stunned, and silence fell upon them.

Wei Wuxian laughed heartily. Lan Xichen's ability to read his brother is beyond his comprehension.

"Wait, he did?" Nie Huaisang examines the young Lan Wangji's face.

"That face does not look like someone who desires Wei Wuxian to come along." Wen Qing observed young Lan Wangji's expression, and all she could see is coldness, stern, and indifference.

"You are mistaken, Wen-guniang, Wangji really wishes for Wei Wuxian to come along," Lan Xichen smiles and glances at his younger brother, whose ears have turned pinker. A flustered younger brother is really a sight to behold.

"How do you know that? How do you read him?" Madam Jin and Cangse Sanren asked simultaneously.

"You've just got to observe and study him harder."

"That's impossible."

Wei Wuxian laughs. He has learned to read his husband's expression each day, and right now, his husband looks rather shy.

The screen then focuses on young Lan Wangji's pink ears.

“Aweee, Hanguang-jun is shy!” Wei Wuxian hugs his husband tightly. A wave of fondness washed over him.

“Ah, so that's all we need to see to determine whether Hanguang-jun is shy or flustered,” a group of disciples nodded vigorously, noting this reaction in their minds.

“A-Zhan, your disciples are teasing you.” Madam Lan laughs.

When Lan Wangji heard the sound of moving water, he looked down at Wei Wuxian's passing boat and closed his eyes before saying, "There's no such thing."

“Sure, whatever helps you sleep at night, Wangji,” Qingheng-jun chuckles.

Witnessing the flustered young Lan Wangji, many cultivators wondered why they had described him as a piece of jade statue with no emotions. True, Lan Wangji has the appearance of a jade statue, effortlessly perfect and flawless, but he is far from the perfect jade statue that people describe him as. Lan Wangji is cold, aloof, and frequently misunderstood by many people. They all avoided him, too afraid to approach, but what the people didn't realize is that he feels a lot on the inside; he's just good at keeping them hidden.

Lan Wangji is likely to bottle up his emotions until they burst, which is very unhealthy. This alone made them realize how wrong they were about Lan Wangji.

The scene abruptly shifts to Wei Wuxian, who is still looking for the rice wine.

"Where is it?" he wonders as he looks around. Then he pauses to sniff the scent again before rowing his boat to find out where it is.

“You're afraid of dogs, but you're acting like a dog right now,” Jin Ling noticed. His uncle's ability to smell wine from a long distance with that nose of his is incredible.

“A-Ling!” Yanli and Jin Zixuan gasped.

“Excuse me?!” Wei Wuxian exclaims, obviously scandalized by his nephews ridiculous observation. “Don’t just associate me with a dog, A-Ling! That is just plain cruel!”

“You’re sniffing the wine’s scent much like how Fairy sniffs for food,” Jin Ling snickers quietly, and Jiang Yanli and Jin Zixuan reprimand him quietly.

God, he's lucky he's his sister's son and he adores him, or else he'd have tackled him to the ground right now.

Jin Ling apologizes after, and Wei Wuxian forgave him quickly.

Noticing how Wei Wuxian rows so fast, the woman at the side calls him, “Lad, why are in such a hurry? Wanna taste my loquats? It’s freshly picked~”

Lan Wangji’s brow twitched.

“Many thanks for your sister's kindness!” Wei Wuxian yelled back, “I’ll come back for your loquats later!”

Because Wei Wuxian's attention was on the lady, he failed to notice the approaching boat ahead, resulting to him nearly falling and his boat ramming into Jin Zixuan’s.

Jin Zixuan got splashed with water.

Jiang Wanyin, Nie Huaisang, and Wei Wuxian failed to contain their snorts.

Jin Zixuan deserved that anyway.

“Ah,” he says as he realizes who is on the other boat. “My apologies, Jin-gongzi,” he says, bowing.

Jin Zixuan remembered his reaction here. Ah, he wants to bury himself right now.

Jin Zixuan, who was now completely soaked, demanded of Wei Wuxian, “Wei Wuxian, you did that on purpose, right?”

Jin Zixuan desperately wants to silence his younger self or else he’ll get a punch from Wei Wuxian or Jiang Wanyin. Madam Jin seems to be enjoying his inner turmoil that she’s laughing terrifyingly.

“In such a wide river, why must your boat collide with mine?”

“Hey, it's not like Senior Wei did it on purpose!” Zizhen defends his Senior Wei.

As if Jin Zixuan didn’t already know that.

“I was that blind; I'll compensate you with some jars of rice wine,” Wei Wuxian swears as Jin Zixuan grabs a handkerchief and wipes his robes.

Jin Zixuan scoffs arrogantly, “No need.”

“Okay,” Wei Wuxian responds. “Since Jin-gongzi doesn’t mind, then I’ll—”

“I’ll be fine if your Jiang Clan stays away from me.”

Many cultivators sucked in a breath.

“How conceited of him!”

“That’s to be expected when a child is born into a wealthy but toxic family.”

“Jin Guangshan obviously did not raise him well.”

“What does he know about raising a child? He had a lot of concubines. He had sex for entertainment and to pass the time, and flaunts his wealth. You think he has time look out for his heir?”

Madam Jin did not stop them. After all, what they said was true. She sighs, wondering why he married such a horrible man. Lan Qiren, Cangse Sanren, and Wei Changze all looked at her with concern.

Jin Zixuan swallows a lump and turns to face his son and wife. With the presence of the entire Jiang Clan here, and especially the Jiang Patriarch and Matriarch, he felt his death was approaching once more. Jiang Yanli, on the other hand, is not upset; rather, she is concerned for him, knowing that what he said will not go down well with her mother. His son, Jin Ling, was speechless. Was his father really this arrogant? How did he and his mother end up together? He asked himself.

Yu Ziyuan fumed. Of course, she knew her friend’s son’s attitude is not pleasant, but she had high expectations for him. After all, he is her friend's son, and she expects him to treat her daughter well, but he continues to disappoint her.

“Is Jiang Clan not enough for your taste, or is A-Li not your taste then, Jin Zixuan?” Yu Ziyuan asked venomously, slowly approaching Jin heir. Jiang Fengmian made no attempt to stop her. He has no reason to, he is also upset with Jin Zixuan, but Jiang Yanli has already blocked Jin Zixuan from her approaching mother.

“Mother, that was in the past, there’s—”

“A-Li! Don't tell me you don't remember every single insult he's ever hurled at you in the past?!” She exclaimed. Jin Zixuan bowed his head in shame. He is aware of his mistakes. He even tried to change after falling in love with Jiang Yanli in order to be a better man for her, to be a good husband for her and their son, and to be a good leader, but his mistakes would always come back to haunt him, like a never-ending nightmare. He desired to run away.

Wei Wuxian and Jiang Wanyin looked at him from the side, neither angry nor offended; they simply pity him.

Jin Zixuan took a deep breath and spoke, “Yu-furen, I recognize my mistakes. I was an arrogant brat in the past, hurt A-Li a lot, but the reason why I was opposed to arrange marriage was because I don’t want my wife and I’s relationship to be like my parents.”

Yu Ziyuan, Madam Jin, and Jiang Fengmian all looked surprised.

“That's how I imagined my future with A-Li: we'd never get along and would only hurt each other, but I was wrong, so wrong about her; she is a wonderful and kind woman, and I adore her; she deserves better.” He cast a glance at Wei Wuxian, recalling his line. “However, I am willing to become better for A-Li and for my son,” He looks down at Jin Ling and caresses his son's cheeks before looking up once more. “Once we get out of here, I will reflect on my actions and punish myself. I sincerely hope the Jiang Clan will forgive me.” He cupped his hands and apologized with the most respectful and sincere bow.

Lots of them were in disbelief. Jin Zixuan bowing? A strange sight indeed, but some were happy for him. Mianmian, Madam Jin, Jiang Yanli, and Wei Wuxian smiled.

“He really is becoming better.” Wei Wuxian whispered and Lan Wangji gave a quiet *‘Mn.’* He and Jin Zixuan may not be considered friends, but they were acquaintances, and he is quite glad that he is willing to lower his pride.

“You better,” Yu Ziyuan says, crossing her arms, “I don't want to see A-Li cry and instruct my son and Wei Wuxian to beat you up. For the time being, I will tolerate any insults from you.”

Jin Zixuan straightened his posture and gives a sigh of relief. "I will, thank you, Yu-furen," he says, turning to Jiang Fengmian, "Jiang-zongzhu." Jiang Fengmian nodded and smiled, as did Wei Wuxian and Jiang Wanyin.

Wei Wuxian comes to a halt and turns, his face darkening, “What do you mean?”

Jin Zixuan turns and scoffs. The air between them becomes tense as Jin Zixuan grips his sword's scabbard while Wei Wuxian clenches his fist in irritation.

“A- Ahahah.” Nie Huaisang’s nervous laughter destroyed the tension in the air as his boat passed between Wei Wuxian and Jin Zixuan’s. “R-Relax, you both calm down.”

“Huaisang-xiong, here’s my advice. It’s said that one takes on the color of one’s company. Please be careful in your choice of friends,” Jin Zixuan says calmly, unconcerned about Wei Wuxian's glare.

Nie Huaisang shakes his head, “Nope, I’d rather be friends with Wei-xiong and Jiang-xiong than others, thank you very much.”

“Beware of neglecting studies; otherwise, your brother will spur you with a sabre again.” The perspective changes below the water, and underneath, a head swims.

“What is that?!” Jingyi exclaims, stepping back and pointing to the screen.

Zizhen sighs exasperatedly, “Do you have to ask and scream every time you see something like that?”

“Jingyi, we fight all kinds of corpses and creatures; that is nothing new to us,” Sizhui says, but he is mistaken. That thing they just saw was unlike anything they had ever seen before.

Wen Ning responds from behind the disciples, “That was a water ghost.”

“Oh.”

“Paddle away—” Jin Zixuan's command was interrupted when his boat shook violently, causing him to sway dangerously.

“Wei Wuxian, you—”

Putting his hands up, Wei Wuxian says, “Don’t look at me. Not me this time.”

In an instant, their boats began to shake violently as well.

“I don’t like this,” A female cultivator shudders.

Jin Zixuan frowns, “This is weird.”

“What’s wrong?” Huaisang inquired, as a powerful wave of water approached and surged up behind him.

Nie Mingjue paled, his hands clenched in worry.

“Look out!” All Nie disciples screamed.

What emerged from the water was a legless, ugly water ghoul. As it pounced, Huaisang screamed.

“Huaisang!” exclaims Nie Mingjue, fully aware that his younger brother is right beside him, but he is still going to worry seeing his past younger brother in danger.

“Da-ge, it’s okay.”

However, a bamboo pole was slammed into the ghoul's head, causing it to fall back into the water. Huaisang, on the other hand, recoiled in terror.

“Wei Wuxian..” Nie Mingjue mumbles in relief, silently thanking him for saving his younger brother.

Because of the unexpected attack, the civilians screamed and quickly ran away from the river.

“Water ghouls, water ghouls!”

Several ghouls resurfaced from the water. A saleslady had difficulty fleeing that her ankle was grabbed by a water ghoul. She was dragged down to the ground, however, Wei Wuxian’s sword responded quickly, slicing the ghoul’s arms and sending it back to the water once more.

Lan Wangji, Lan Qiren, Cangse Sanren, and Wei Changze were impressed.

Wei Wuxian landed not far away from the lady, his cheerful expression replaced by seriousness.

“Senior Wei looks cooler with his sword,” Zizhen commented, wondering how powerful he would be if he continued to use his sword.

Jingyi raised a brow at his friend, “Are you implying Senior Wei does not look cool using Chenqing?”

“No! He's amazing with both!” Zizhen quickly countered, and Jingyi nodded in agreement.

“I wonder what the sword’s name is,” Sizhui wondered. Knowing his Xian-gege, the name is unlikely to be anything flashy or serious.

At the side, Jiang Wanyin rolled his eyes while Wei Wuxian giggled. When the name is revealed, the disciples will be so disappointed.

“Help!” Nie Huaisang yelled as another massive ghoul appeared and climbed onto Huaisang's boat.

Many cultivators, particularly Nie Mingjue, had their jaws clenched as a wave of worry washed over them. Nie Mingjue does not want to see his brother in such danger. If he stayed in Gusu and studied, he would not be in this much danger.

The massive ghoul's weight gradually caused the boat to sink. Nie Huaisang holds onto the boat's railing immediately. Jin Zixuan, who was nearby Nie Huaisang, was attacked one by one by ghouls, preventing him from saving Nie Huaisang.

But then, blue slashes cut down the ghouls, and massive waves surged up once more. Lan Xichen successfully landed on the roof of Nie Huaisang's boat.

“T-Thank you, this young—,” Nie Huaisang says slowly, pausing when he realizes it was Lan Xichen who had saved him. “Xi-Xichen-ge!”

Nie Mingjue turned to Lan Xichen’s direction and nodded to him in thanks.

“Wow, that was close.”

“I know. I’m glad Zewu-jun is nearby.”

"Why did he come if he's going to be that useless guy in the group anyway?" asks an old man, his lips quirking up as if mocking Nie Huaisang’s inability to fight.

“Yeah, he's a burden on the group,” a man retorts. Both were unaware that Nie Mingjue's expression had already darkened.

“I dare both of you to say it again,” he says darkly, approaching the two men who are now hiding behind a pillar. Nie Huaisang immediately held his his brother's hand and shakes his head.

“Cultivators never learn,” Lan Qiren sighs as he massages his temples.

Cultivators can call Nie Huaisang anything, but useless. Heaven knows he’s far from being one. He is omniscient and a deceiving. Either he uses all the information he has to his advantage or not. Forget about being the laughing-stock in the cultivation world.

On the pier, Wei Wuxian continued slashing the ghouls without breaking a sweat, and tw irling his sword in the process. Not from away from him, Jiang Wanyin landed on the roof of another boat.

“We got this!” He exclaims.

Then, numerous talismans passed through between them, sticking to the ghouls’ foreheads. Shortly, brightly coloured golden arrays materialized above them. Wei Wuxian turns around to see Lan Wangji flying above him. The arrays overpowered the ghouls, causing them to submerge into the water and retreat.

“So cool, Hanguang-jun!”

“Ugh, I wish I was good as young Hanguang-jun; my skills are shit.”

“Yeah I agree, I need to train after we get out of here.”

“Take us with you as well!”

“You think Hanguang-jun can train us?”

“He will, right?”

“Wangji, will you train your disciples?” Qingheng-jun asked, amused that the little ducklings kept looking at his son, and Lan Wangji, being fond of the disciples, nodded with a small smile on his lips.

“I'm excited to see what you can teach them. Perhaps Wei Wuxian can also train them,” Qingheng-jun suggests, turning to his son's husband.

“Ah, I don’t really train disciples how to fight, that’s Hanguang-jun’s work. I only teach them how to hunt, create, and use talismans.” Wei Wuxian responds, drawing puzzled looks from his parents.

“Why not? You seem good at fighting.” Wei Changze says, and Cangse Sanren agrees. The way his son fought with Lan Wangji on the roof, and the way he sliced the ghouls down, she doubts his son’s fighting skill are that bad.

“My skills really need to improvement,” Wei Wuxian says with a forced smile, “so until I get better, Hanguang-jun will train them.”

“We can train together then,” Cangse Sanren suggested, and Wei Wuxian's eyes twinkled with joy.

“Really?!”

Lan Wangji resisted the urge to kiss his husband. Being this adorable should be illegal! A smiling husband is already bad for his heart. Lan Xichen chuckled as he noticed his younger brother pouting slightly. Oh, his brother is so cute!

“Yes, if you’ll let us—”

“Absolutely!”

Lan Wangji quickly landed to another boat near Wei Wuxian. The perspective shifts beneath the water once more, allowing the cultivators to see the ghouls swimming away from the land.

“The water ghouls are retreating.” Wei Wuxian informs.

Lan Wangji immediately turned to his brother, his frown deepening, “Biling Lake is not the only place haunted by the water ghouls.”

Lan Xichen concurs. “The situation is more serious than I thought,” he says, turning to face the numerous destroyed boats.

Wen Qing and Wen Ning lowered their heads. Soon, the Waterborne Abyss will attack.

Wei Wuxian raised his sword to inspect the strands wrapped around his sword's blade. “Those wicked things slipped away so fast!”

The cultivators cringed.

“Disgusting.” Yu Ziyuan grimaces.

Nie Huaisang, who is now in front of Lan Xichen, makes a small bow.

“Huaisang, you can’t ride on a flying sword. Wait for us here. Everyone else, come with me to Biling Lake.” Lan Xichen announces as the scene shifts to the river, and faded shortly.

Nie Mingjue released a breath he had held earlier. Perhaps it is better for his brother to stay there and stay out of trouble.

The setting changed to a narrowed river path heading towards the center of the river, boats each with a cultivator on board.

“Lan-gongzi, has Caiyi Town ever been haunted by water ghouls?” Wei Wuxian inquired, curious.

“Never,” Lan Xichen responded. “They only appeared recently. I had formations and nets set up around Biling Lake, and caught a dozen water ghouls in a row. The majority of the bodies were not recognized by the locals.”

“How strange,” Wei Wuxian began. “Water ghouls are picky about their area. They usually stay at their drowning spot. Very few ever leave.” Then he pauses for moment before continuing. “Besides, I think what we encountered just now was not merely a water ghoul.”

Lan Xichen hums in agreement, “Even the combined efforts of you and Wangji failed to catch it. The creature was truly vicious.”

“Ugh, so troublesome.” Mianmian asked, and Lan Xichen nods.

“Though water ghouls are vicious, they are not particularly strong, but they are extremely cunning. That makes it difficult for even a powerful cultivator to catch them,” he explained.

Without responding to Lan Xichen’s words, Wei Wuxian bends down to dip his hand in the water and scoops the strands to his hand. It seemed to be the same strands that were wrapped around his sword earlier.

Those who were there at that time knew what that thing was on Wei Wuxian’s hands, and they silently cursed those fucking Wens.

Jin Ling cringed, “Eww, that is really is disgusting.”

“Those strands look exactly like the ghoul's hair,” Sizhui noticed, his gaze fixed on the screen.

“You’re right,” Zizhen concurs, “but at the same time it looks different. What could it be?”

“You’ll find out later. Keep watching.” Lan Qiren says, getting annoyed by the disciple’s constant whispering.

“So catching it with nets is unlikely,” Wei Wuxian says, observing the strands before turning to Lan Xichen . “ Zewu-jun , water ghouls are very clever; if we use the boats and take our time like this, isn't it possible that they'll hide underwater and never come out? Won’t we have to keep on searching forever? What if we can’t find them?”

“He has a point,” mutters Madam Lan. Even though she hasn't had much experience hunting or catching creatures, she understands the frustration of not being able to catch one and having to wait an eternity for it to come out.

Lan Wangji, who is ahead of them all and has been listening, responds, “We will have to wait until we find them. After all, we do what we have to do.”

Lan Qiren, Lan Xichen, and Qingheng-jun nod simultaneously, silently praising him.

“Aww, so righteous, Hanguang-jun!” Jingyi praises and Lan Wangji huffs in amusement.

“Some cultivators really need to learn from Hanguang-jun.” A female cultivator casts a glance at the perverted man who had earlier stared at her, and when the man notices, his face contorts with anger.

“Excuse me?!”

“Shut up!” The female cultivator frowns. “The Immortal is staring at you.”

Startled, He jerked his head to see where Baoshan Sanren was, only to find her staring solemnly at the screen. He became even more enraged when he heard giggles beside him. His hands were itching to strangle her, but with the presence of the immortal and powerful sects, he knew he'd be punished later, which he was trying to avoid at all costs.

Wei Wuxian raises a brow, “Just by using nets?”

“That’s right,” Lan Xichen responds with a nod. “Does the Yunmeng Jiang Sect employ alternative methods?”

Several people's gazes were drawn to Wei Wuxian, who was clinging to his husband's arms.

An elderly man rudely asked, “That’s right; do you have any *‘other’* methods, Wei Wuxian?"

Several people frowned at him, as if he was implying something.

A man rolled his eyes, muttering, “If he ever has one, I bet his *‘other’* method is associated with demonic cultivation.”

Lan Wangji was so close to asking Baoshan Sanren to kick them all out of here. He has been holding back since earlier. Any slightest provocation, he’s certain he'll attack without any hesitation.

“I’m sorry, but Senior Wei can think of other methods, demonic or otherwise; how about you? Can you think of any?” Jingyi crosses his arms and looks at the old man, challengingly. “I bet if you did think of one, I doubt it’ll be considered an alternative method.” He adds, eliciting a chorus of laughter behind him. Jiang Yanli and Wei Wuxian smiles fondly at them.

At that time, Wei Wuxian mentioned the tools, which of course, the cultivators had yet to see in the next scene, and really, those tools became one of the most useful tools in the cultivation world.

The old man was aware of Wei Wuxian's capability, which made him more angry knowing he could not offer any alternative method since he's not really that smart, and all he does is hunt and, well……fight civilians for fun.

“I'll take that silence as a yes then, old fart,” Jingyi says, smirking.

‘Why is this kid so rude? So un-Lan!’

The man’s face turned red in anger, “You—!”

“Jingyi!” Lan Qiren exclaims, and Jingyi immediately hides behind Sizhui with a head peeking out and a sheepish smile on his lips.

“Sorry, Grandmaster Lan!”

Lan Xichen and Qingheng-jun chuckle, delighted by the sight of Lan Qiren’s misery.

“Lan Qiren, are you alright? Is your disciple making your head hurt more? Do you need a drink?” Cangse Sanren teases as Wei Changze tries very hard to stop her.

Which is impossible…

“Do. Not. Get. Near. Me.” Lan Qiren hisses. “I already have a handful of people in the sect; I don't need you to join.”

Cangse Sanren responds with a laugh.

Of course, the Yunmeng Jiang Sect used nets as well. But, because he was a good swimmer, he had always jumped into the river and dragged water ghouls out. However, this method was too dangerous; he definitely couldn’t do it in front of the Lan Sect’s people.

‘If this travelled into Lan Qiren’s ear’s ears, I would definitely face another lecture,’ **Wei Wuxian says in his mind.**

Lan Qiren’s brows twitched as a few cultivators snort behind him. He will undoubtedly lecture him.

“I would like to see that.” Jiang Wanyin says, his expression devoid with emotion.

Wei Wuxian pouts, “You are so cruel Jiang Cheng.”

“So, you and Uncle swim together to hunt water ghouls?” Jin Ling inquires and both brothers nod.

Yu Ziyuan and Jiang Fengmian recalled seeing the brothers dragging a ghoul out of the water and presenting it to the civilians, which scared them and caused them to run away. Yu Ziyuan chastised the two of them, telling them not to drag out a water ghoul and present it to the people as if it were gold or a pheasant that they simply caught. She also chastised them for their behavior, but as usual, Jiang Fengmian defends the two, saying they're just kids and can do whatever they want, but she was against it.

Jiang Yanli also remembered staying at the docks with a towel to wait for her brothers after swimming and hunting, and then head home to eat her cooked soup.

“How do you actually drag out a ghoul?” Nie Mingjue asked.

“Besides the nets, we use our hands to drag them out,” Wei Wuxian responds, and the cultivators stared incredulously at him.

“Do you, like, hold them by the neck or by the hair?” Jingyi inquired.

“I think by the neck,” Zizhen responds to him.

“I would not hold a ghoul by the neck,” says a Jiang disciple.

Jingyi turns to Wei Wuxian for an answer, asking, "How about you, Senior Wei? How do you hold them, by the neck or by the hair?

He was about to respond when his cheeks flushed bright red and a memory flashed through his mind.

Every night, the pulling and gripping—no!

“You should ask Lan Wangji that; he'll give you an answer,” Nie Huaisang says to Jingyi, his lips smirking. Lan Wangji glared at him.

“Why, Hanguang-jun?” he wondered. “He hadn't dragged a ghoul like Senior Wei.”

Ah, so innocent, “Oh, I don’t know, maybe he tried.”

Jingyi regarded the Sect Leader with suspicion before turning to Lan Wangji and asking, “Hanguang-jun?”

“Do not.” Lan Wangji responds, his tone stern, and everyone knows that’s the end of the discussion.

Wei Wuxian puts his hand on his chin and says, “It’d be great if there’s something that can attract the water ghouls like a fishing bait, or something that can point out their directions, like a compass.”

The cultivators were taken aback.

“You already thought about those even before?” Nie Mingjue inquired, his eyes wide.

“I've always been on hunts, and it can be difficult to catch creatures or corpses at times, so that thought crossed my mind. I just never voice it out or had the motivation to create it.” He responds, and the disciples' eyes light up with admiration. First his theory about the resentful energy and now this.

Spirit-Attraction Flag, and Compass of evil, were the most used tools in the cultivation world as these made hunting more easier. Though they despised the inventor, they shamelessly used his tools without his consent, spread them all over, and even made ineffective imitations.

“He’s so awesome..”

“I know, Hanguang-jun is so lucky.”

Two female cultivators commented, but, of course, those who despised Wei Wuxian also spoke in an unpleasant manner.

“He could have created tools that used spiritual energy and that would’ve been better.”

“I agree; those tools could have done a lot more with spiritual energy than resentful energy.”

Nie Huaisang groans. It was so tempting to smack them across the face with a fan. Can they possibly get any dumber?

Mianmian, who had clenched her fist in anger, had had enough of them.

“Ungrateful bastards, all you do is complain and speak nonsense. As if you all are not using those tools now! Can’t you just thank the inventor for making our hunting easier?!” Mianmian exclaimed, her voice resonating in the temple. The two men looked at her in disbelief, as if they couldn't believe a delicate woman would yell at them.

Wei Wuxian lets out a tired sigh. He is grateful to her for defending him in the past and even now. “That's enough, Mianmian.”

“No! I’ve had enough; they just don’t stop! If they complain so much, why don’t they create the tools themselves?! I’d bow them them if it worked, but then again, you all are not as remarkably intelligent and imaginative as Wei Wuxian, so you all just shut up and behave!”

There was a long pause.

The disciples were taken aback. They would worship her right now if they could, but it's too awkward right now. Mianmian, who was panting a bit, finally calmed down and sat down. Madam Jin looked at her as if she had grown another head. *'Since when was Luo Qingyang been this loud and expressive?'* She asked in her mind.

Jin Zixuan trembled. The image of an enraged Mianmian was unfamiliar to him, but also terrifying. He makes a mental note not to anger her in the future.

Jiang Wanyin swings the bamboo pole into the water, splashing Wei Wuxian, taking his attention away from his imagination. Jiang Wanyin then proceeds to say, "Look into the water and focus on finding it. Don't let your imagination run wild again."

Wei Wuxian rises to his feet and laughs, "Cultivation and flying swords used to be wild ideas, too!" he says as he paddles closer to Jiang Wanyin's boat. "Furthermore, Biling Lake is brimming with resentful energy, thus it attracts water ghouls. Instead of treating the symptoms by catching water ghouls, why not harness the resentful energy to eliminate the root cause?"

Nie Huaisang and Lan Wangji had thoughtful expressions, as if they were thinking about Wei Wuxian's words.

"What is it with you and your obsession with resentful energy?!" Yu Ziyuan exclaimed. Resentful energy this, resentful energy that. What is so great about resentful energy? she wondered.

"Mother, please refrain from yelling." Yanli calmly says as she faces her mother with a neutral expression, which made Yu Ziyuan pause to stare at her. Her daughter loves to smile a lot, but this expression was something she does not ever want to see.

"Resentful energy is a complex subject that cultivators find fascinating. Did you not notice? After Wei Wuxian was recognized as a demonic cultivator, a lot of cultivators became interested in it and studied it," Baoshan Sanren says, turning to face Yu Ziyuan with a sharp stare. "Those cultivators probably had already thought about resentful energy but did not pursue it, afraid that the cultivation world would scorn them, but with Wei Wuxian introduced as a demonic cultivator, they were motivated." She says, and in her hand was a ball of spiritual energy that soon shapes into a person.

“Take him, for example.”

‘ Xue Yang…’

“He may not be one of those cultivators who were afraid of being scorned by others, but I say he's a very smart man; he knows a quite a bit about resentful energy, but sadly, he's someone I despise,” she clenched her fist, and the image of Xue Yang crumbles.

‘ Xue Yang…how unfortunate.’

Jiang Wanyin exhales sharply and pushes Wei Wuxi an's boat away from him, glaring, “Copying ‘Righteousness’ ten times wasn’t enough?”

“Huh?”

Wei Wuxian covers his mouth with his hand and laughs sheepishly as Jiang Wanyin scoffs. He then shifts his gaze to Lan Wangji, who is perfectly poised in his boat.

“It’s like his eyes automatically searches for Lan Wangji.” Jin Zixuan observed.

“Well, Lan-er-gongzi is very good-looking, so I don't blame A-Xian," Yanli says, a smile on her lips.

“Yes, Lan Zhan is very good-looking; who doesn’t stare at him?”

“We don’t.” Jin Zixuan and Jiang Wanyin says simultaneously, drawing a laugh from Lan Xichen and Wei Wuxian's parents.

Wei Wuxian scrutinizes Lan Wangji's form starting from head to toe until his gaze dropped below the boat.

"**Hey, Lan Zhan!" he exclaims, leaping and waving to catch his attention. "Look at me, look at me!"**

Jiang Wanyin gaped in shock and facepalmed, tired of his brother's antics.

"**Wei Wuxian, could you please stop fooling around for a change?!" Jiang Wanyin complains.**

Jiang Wanyin reacted in the same way as his past self. Jiang Yanli and Jiang Fengmian both laughed in amusement.

Lan Wangji, still looking ahead, missed Wei Wuxian's approaching boat, but when he got close, Lan Wangji moved his eyes with a small, *'Hm?'*

With a loud cracking sound, Wei Wuxian rams the bamboo pole into the water.

The cultivators gaped in shock.

"Huh?!"

"What the fuck—"

"What the hell are you doing?!"

Wei Changze and Lan Qiren were horrified. Together, they exclaimed, "Why did you attack Lan Wangji?!"

“I did not! I was just—”

Large waves of water were splashed into the air. Lan Wangji’s eyes widened. He quickly moved his sleeves out of the way to avoid getting wet and jumped to his brother’s boat.

“You—!” He couldn't finish his sentence before Wei Wuxian jumped to Lan Wangji's boat, then back to his own boat, landing on the roof. Using the bamboo pole, he launches the boat into the air.

Many were astonished by the sudden display of strength.

“You’re telling me you can launch a huge ass boat in the air like that and couldn’t even carry a dozen lecture books?” Jingyi stared incredulously at Wei Wuxian.

“Why carry them when I can have someone carry them for me?” he smirks, placing his hand on Lan Wangji's sturdy chest.

Jingyi groans, “Forget I even asked.”

Once the boat slowly flipped over in the air, the cultivators were able to see three water ghouls clinging below.

“Water ghouls!”

The cultivators grew more stunned as their minds processed what Wei Wuxian had done.

“Wow.”

“How could he have known there were ghouls beneath the boat?”

“Don't ask me; I'm not sure either.”

An array immediately materialized above the ghouls, and in an instant, the ghouls disappeared, already purified by Lan Wangji.

Lan Xichen cupped his hands and bowed to Wei Wuxian, an appreciative smile on his lips. “How did you know they were under Wangji's boat, Wei-gongzi?” he inquired.

Wei Wuxian lands perfectly on his boat, “Simple,” he began, putting the bamboo pole down. “The draft was incorrect; Lan-er-gongzi was the only one on board, but its draft was deeper than a boat with more people. Therefore, something must have clang onto the bottom.”

Lan Wangji smiled, or rather felt smug and proud about how good his husband is.

And now the cultivators understand why Wei Wuxian felt compelled to do so. His keen observation and unusual experience at such a young age is astounding to see, and what some cultivator lacked. Most of them, in their young age, struggled a lot in training and cultivating, but him, he was a whole another level. He is gifted, being the son of Cangse Sanren, and the immortal’s disciple.

Some people were beginning to respect him.

“Oh wow, I never realized that.” A man says, suddenly feeling a bit of admiration to Wei Wuxian.

“Neither do I,” the lady next to him says, a smile on her lips.

”Note that down!” Zizhen orders as the disciples nod and grab their talismans and brushes.

“We can just keep that in mind, right? There's no need to take it down.” Jin Ling, who had been enjoying the scenes for a while, was feeling a little lazy to write.

“If you managed to remember that, sure, why not?” Sizhui says, returning his gaze to the screen.

“That was so good, A-Ying! Oh, I can imagine us going on a nighthunt together, that'll be so good!” Cangse Sanren exclaims, and Wei Changze agrees. Wei Wuxian believes her mother. Just thinking about how their night hunt will go excites him. It makes him ecstatic.

Lan Xichen hums in response, then proceeds to say, “You are experienced indeed.”

Yu Ziyuan couldn’t help but clench her jaw in anger. Wei Wuxian consistently outshines Jiang Cheng in everything, and now some are admiring him. But his son is already a powerful Sect Leader of Yunmeng Jiang, which is something she wished for before she died and has now come true. She can only hope that his son continues to improve.

“Lan Zhan, I didn't mean to splash water on you,” Wei Wuxian says as he rows the boat. “Water ghouls are cunning; if I had said it aloud, they would have heard and fled.”

Lan Wangji did not bat an eye on him.

“Hey, don’t ignore me, Lan-er-gongzi ! Lan—”

Lan Wangji gestured with his hand to silence Wei Wuxian. His smile faded and turned to whatever caught Lan Wangji’s attention. From above, a dark mass of shadow was spreading below the lake, slowly approaching the boats. Soon, the waters became turbulent and a cyclone of water shot up in the air.

Wei Wuxian's smile returned as he exclaimed, "It's coming!"

Nie Huaisang shudders, "Why are you so excited about this?!"

Jiang Wanyin rolls his eyes and says, "He's always excited when hunting; what's so shocking about it?"

The turbulent waters approaches the boats at an unimaginable speed. The water then shaped itself into the shape of arms before attacking the Lan Brothers' boat. Simultaneously, the brothers unsheathed their swords from their scabbards and gracefully circled around each other. Blue spiritual energy encircled them before attacking the water, sending it back away.

Lan Qiren and Qingheng-jun nodded and smiled, pleased with the brothers' display of skill and accurate reaction.

The cultivators blinked several times. It is not every day they get to see the Twin Jades in action. Within their generation, the Brothers were renowned as gifted cultivators with an exceptionally high level of cultivation and remarkable skills. It was incredible to witness. It's even more incredible to consider that in their generation, only the top three men, Lan Xichen, Lan Wangji, and Wei Wuxian, possessed skills and exceptional cultivation.

Jin Zixuan suddenly felt like he didn't deserve to be in the top three, while Jiang Wanyin didn't mind ranking fifth. He's already come to terms with the fact that his brother excels at everything he attempts.

While the parents of Wei Wuxian and Lan Wangji were proud, Yu Ziyuan was not pleased with the display of skills but did not express her displeasure.

The disciples' eyes twinkled with awe. They will never grow tired of admiring this couple, and Zewu-jun!

Lan Wangji leaped to the sky, unleashing powerful slashes from left to right, dismembering every molded arm. He lands on the boat's roof, but in front of him is a massive wave of water with hands ready to attack him. But in an instant, several red slashes flashed in front of him, easily cutting the hands.

“Fine blade,” Lan Wangji complimented. “What’s the name?”

“Oh god,” Jiang Fengmian and Jiang Wanyin facepalmed. Jiang Yanli proceeds to giggle.

“What do you think its name is?” Zizhen inquired, excited. He'd been thinking about the sword's name since he first saw it.

“Zhèngyì (Justice)?” Sizhui suggests. His Xian-gege has a strong sense of justice, making it an ideal sword name.

“Wúsī (Selfless)?” Jin Ling speculates. Wei Wuxian is selfless, so it fits as a sword name.

“Lì rì (Bright Sun)?” Jingyi also suggests. Wei Wuxian has the brightest smile that rivals the sun. It hurts his eyes, but completely warms him inside and out. A very suitable name for a good sword.

“Good names, but that’s not it.” Wei Wuxian says, giggling, as Lan Wangji huffs.

“Suíbiàn (Whatever).” Wei Wuxian responded, swinging his hand as the sword hovers in front of him, preparing to attack again.

Cangse Sanren and Wei Changze burst out laughing, while others looked perplexed.

Nie Mingjue frowns, “What?”

“That’s the name?” Madam Jin asks, fully expecting a very fancy name.

“We shouldn’t have suggested names then,” Zizhen and the rest of the disciples were so disappointed that Wen Ning couldn’t help but smile while Wen Qing sighs exasperatedly.

Lan Wangi stared at him. Wei Wuxian thought that he didn’t hear properly, so he repeated it again, “Suíbiàn (Whatever).”

And his sword flies.

“You could have come up with a better name than whatever,” Miamian remarks, rolling her eyes.

“Expect the unexpected,” Lan Xichen mutters, his tone amused.

“You’ll be shocked, Jiang Cheng is worse at naming things. It’s funny. He named his puppies Jasmine, Princess, and Little Love.” he says, continuing to laugh.

Jiang Cheng scoffs, “Compared to your *‘Whatever’* and *‘Little Apple’,* my puppies’ names are so much better!”

“Those were decent names!” Jin Ling interjected, just to defend his uncle.

“You named your dog *'Fairy,'* Jin Ling,” Jingyi snorts. “Who names a dog ‘*Fairy?”*”

“Fairy is a good name,” Jin Zixuan says casually, and the disciples, Jiang Wanyin and Wei Wuxian, turned to stare at him.

“Oh, of course you’ll defend your son,” Wei Wuxian rolls his eyes. “What’s your dog’s name then? Little brown? Whitie?”

“A-Xian!” Yanli laughs.

Lan Wangji frowned, “That sword has a spirit. Calling it as one pleases is disrespectful.” he reprimands as his sword also hovers in front of him, then flies to follow Wei Wuxian’s sword.

“When Uncle Jiang bestowed this sword to me, he let me name it. I wasn’t satisfied with any of my namings, and wanted him to help me name it, so I said *‘Whatever’.”* He explained, and in the screen, the two swords fly, circling around each other until they attack the water, slicing and dancing in the air like two fairies. “After the sword was forged, it really named *‘Whatever’!”* With such speed, Wei Wuxian's sword snapped back into its scabbard. “See, I didn’t lie.”

Lan Wangji found himself at a loss for words as his sword returned to him as well. In a few seconds, he said, “Absurd.”

Absurd, indeed.

Some cultivators laughed at the story while Lan Qiren turned to Jiang Fengmian, his brows twitching. Under his disapproving gaze, the Jiang Patriarch let out a light laugh. Beside him, Yu Ziyuan shook her head disapprovingly.

“So it wasn’t intentional. But it is still a bad name,” Jin Zixuan complains, earning a light slap from Yanli. “Ow! Sorry, love.”

“The sword must love you if they accepted name,” Madam Lan smiled.

Above the sky, the dark mass of shadow slowly fades away beneath the lake.

“Absurd?” Wei Wuxian exclaims. “It’s such a good name! It tricks serious people like you all the time!” he then laughs.

“Don’t you have any other thing to do than tease my nephew?” Lan Qiren says, slightly glaring at the grinning Yiling Patriarch.

"He was so repressed and stubbornly obedient to the rules of Lan Sect in the past that it made me want to break him apart,” he says truthfully, which irritates Lan Qiren even more, while Lan Xichen, Qingheng-jun, and Madam Lan huffs in amusement. Lan Wangji simply sighed.

Wei Wuxian had already broken him the moment they met on the roof under the moonlight.

Away from the boats, thick vine-like strands resurfaced and then submerged back to the water. It approaches the boats, specifically, below Jiang Wanyin’s boat.

Yu Ziyuan, Jiang Fengmian, and Jiang Yanli inhaled sharply.

“What is that?” A Nie disciple asked, hiding behind his other friend and shuddering slightly.

The vines gradually reappeared behind Jiang Wanyin. His back was facing the creature, completely unaware of the danger that lay ahead. The hissing sounds, however, alerted him to the danger lurking behind him. He glances to the side as he moves his hand to grip the hilt of his sword. Then, he swung.

The vines dodges, sinking back into the water.

“Be careful!” Jiang Wanyin warns. “Something’s in the water!”

In an instant, Jiang Wanyin's boat shook, causing him to gasp and sway.

“A-Cheng!” Yanli exclaims, her heart racing, but Jiang Wanyin holds her hand, assuring her that everything will be fine—that he will be fine.

The perspective shifts underwater, and the cultivators watched as the vines moves aimlessly with great speed.

They were all tense. This thing was fast and strangely frightening.

All the boats were now shaking. The waters became violently turbulent. Two disciples from another boat began to lose their balance.

Jingyi may not be smart, but he won't be fooled by that face. He may looked a lot younger, but he still recognized him.

“Su Shit?!” he exclaimed, his face contorted in disgust. He had forgotten that Zewu-jun had mentioned that he would be there. He is certain that his mood will be sour for a while.

“That’s him?!” Zizhen gaped in shock. Beside him, Sizhui was strangely stiff in place.

“I can't believe I'm seeing him wearing Lan robes,” Jin Ling remarked, mirroring Jingyi's expression.

“Lan colors does not suit him at all.” Jingyi remarked, a huge smirk on his lips.

“Jingyi, don't be disrespectful to the dead,” Sizhui reminded him sternly.

Many of them frowned as they recognized Su She. He appeared much more innocent here. No one would have expected he would become Jin Guangyao’s right hand in the future.

Jiang Wanyin and Lan Wangji clenched their fists. He's no longer alive, but they'll never forgive him for participating in Jin Guangyao's schemes. Ever.

"I had no idea he was a Lan," an unknown cultivator said, puzzled. He only knows Su She is from the Moling Su Sect.

"Gusu Lan is a formidable sect; what made him leave?" enquired a female rogue cultivator, and some knew the answer but refused to disclose it.

An old man clicked his tongue, "Honestly, good for him to leave the sect. He's just going to stain Gusu Lan Sect's name."

"What's this?!" Jin Zixuan exclaimed.

Lan Wangji moved quickly. His sword spins in the air before being directed underwater. Into the depths, were a ridiculous amount of dark vines, quickly surrounding the sword. There was an explosion underwater, as if the sword had pierced something. A few moments later, the sword resurfaced along with the dark vines that resembled hair. It landed in front of his feet.

Lan Wangji looked at it, perplexed. "This is…?"

"It came back!" Su She exclaimed. Then he drew his sword and directed it underwater to pierce the vines as well. However, after his sword went underwater, it never emerged again. He chanted the sword incantation for a few more times, but nothing was retrieved from the water. It was as if his sword had been devoured by the lake, disappearing without a trace.

Lan Qiren, Lan Xichen, and Lan Wangji all shook their heads in disapproval, while Wei Wuxian just looked at him with an unreadable expression.

“Ha! In your face!” laughed Jingyi, and Sizhui slapped him.

“Just because Hanguang-jun does something cool does not mean he’s going to do it too," mutters Zizhen, as if offended on Lan Wangji’s behalf. “He’s so out of his league.” Even he is not that stupid to do what he did.

Su She’s face paled. An older disciple beside him spoke, “Su She, right now, we still haven’t determined what the thing inside the water is. Why did you act on your own and make your sword go underwater?”

A bit flustered, Su She calmly responded, “I saw that Lan-er-gongzi also…”

He realized, before he even finished speaking, how unsuitable this sentence was. Whatever the case, the Bichen sword or Lan Wangji were incomparable to others. An embarrassed shade of red seeped through his pale complexion, as if he had been disgraced.

“You truly are a disgrace,” Jiang Wanyin hissed, and Yanli looked at him with concern. She doesn't know the man on the screen, but she knows he's someone everyone hates. He most likely did something in the future that made everyone despise him.

“I completely agree with you,” Mianmian says, her face impassive.

Without batting an eye on Su She, Lan Wangji, Wei Wuxian, Jiang Wanyin, and Jin Zixuan all hovered their swords in front of them. Bichen, Suibian, Suihua, and Sandu dashed forward and dives underwater. As before, there were explosions underwater, the swords piercing the creature. The boats shook again, and the waters became turbulent for a split second before calming down.

“Pull up the net.” Lan Xichen ordered.

Once the net was raised from the water, they only see a few dark vines. Nothing had been caught.

"Hm?" Lan Xichen wondered, his face puzzled. “There should have been water ghouls. What happened?”

Nie Mingjue sighed heavily, while Wen Ning and Wen Qing looked down in guilt. They knew they weren't to blame, that it wasn't them who drove the Waterborne Abyss downstream, but knowing that it was one of the Wens who did it, and them having the surname Wen, it was embarrassing and shameful.

“What exactly is lurking beneath that lake?” Wei Changze wondered.

There was silence as the sky was gradually darkening.

“Lan Zhan, it seems odd.” Wei Wuxian observed.

Beneath the lake, a snake-like resentful energy swims.

The cultivators gasped in shock.

Jiang Yanli’s eyes widened, “T-That’s the—”

“Waterborne Abyss,” Jiang Fengmian finishes, his tone darkening slightly, which surprised both Yu Ziyuan and Jiang Wanyin.

“Turn around.” Lan Wangji ordered.

“Why?” Lan Xichen asked.

“The creature led us to the center of Biling Lake on purpose.” Lan Wangji responded, frowning.

The way Lan Wangji realized before anyone else that the Waterborne Abyss had led them to the center of Biling Lake astonished them. Besides his high cultivation, he is smart as well. He is, without a doubt, perceptive.

A cyclone of water shoots up in the air and crashes onto the water. It grew in number, crashing and attacking the boats, tearing them to shreds. The waters became turbulent again, resulting in a large number of waves.

The creature growled.

Worry washed over Lan Xichen as he realized what creature is attacking them. “This is bad; it’s the Waterborne Abyss!”

Cultivators cursed the Wens beneath their breath. Wei Wuxian notices the Wen siblings looking down, so he glared at all of them and exclaimed, "Can you all just shut up and watch?!"

They listened quickly.

Sizhui glanced at his relatives and moved next to them.

Su She and the older disciple’s boat were destroyed. They both screamed as they were thrown into the air, swirling around the water cyclone.

Five different colored slices of spiritual energy attacked the cyclone. As a result, the water cyclone growled loudly.

Fortunately, Su She and the other disciples that were hurled into the air earlier had escaped and dived down underwater. Moments later, they all resurfaced, panting slightly. Missing his sword, Su She swims to a flipped over boat that is still intact.

"That's what you get for acting on your own." Nie Huaisang whispers grimly. Nie Mingjue, who was sitting beside him, wondered if this was his real brother. The shift in emotion was troubling.

Flying above, Lan Xichen spoke, "It's extremely vicious, beyond our capabilities. Our priority is saving lives." He turned behind him. "Jiang-gongzi, please pair up with Wei-gongzi. Wangji and Jin-gonzi group up with me. Act separately!"

"Understood!"

The group then split up, flying in different directions. Wei Wuxian and Jiang Wanyin flies through the water cyclone, and dodging all of the attacks at a remarkable speed.

"What does your sword specialize in?" Jin Ling asked Wei Wuxian. He already noticed earlier that his sword had outstanding speed.

"Speed," Wei Wuxian responded with a smile and he nodded. *Knew it.*

Wei Wuxian gaped as he noticed the dark vines extending, shooting forward and reaching towards them like tentacles. The Jiang brothers easily avoided the vines, demonstrating their extensive experience that every cultivator their age lacked.

"I want to see Sect Leader Jiang fight; he seems good," a Nie disciple said quietly, and beside him, a Jiang disciple responded.

"Sect Leader Jiang is extremely good; he's just an aggressive fighter, which can be frightening at times."

Yu Ziyuan, who had heard her disciple, nodded in approval. That's something she'd like to see soon. Perhaps she can suggest a sparring match to her son as well.

“Really?” The Nie disciple wondered and the Jiang disciple nodded. A friend of the Jiang disciple joins in as well.

“I was present when Hanguang-jun and Sect Leader Jin clashed on Dafan Mountain. It was both amazing and terrifying to witness their encounter.”

The brothers were chased continuously by the dark vines. Separating from Jiang Wanyin, Wei Wuxian moves to dive into the water.

Lan Wangji, Wei Wuxian’s parents and Jiang Yanli grew worried.

Seconds later, Wei Wuxian resurfaced, flying and surfing in the turbulent waters while avoiding the vines. And then he sees Su She on the boat and approaches.

“No! Don't save him!” screams Jingyi, making the cultivators flinch at his shrill voice. Lan Wangji and Jiang Wanyin are both secretly in agreement with him.

“Ugh, you're too good, Wei Wuxian; why are you like that?” Mianmian complains, concerned at the prospect of him sacrificing himself to save that jerk. Wei Wuxian could only laugh sheepishly.

“What an ungrateful brat,” mutters Madam Jin. She, too, was unfamiliar with this man, but she frequently saw him with Jin Guangyao. According to everyone's reactions, this man did something bad to Wei Wuxian. She may dislike Wei Wuxian, but she mostly dislikes people who are ungrateful.

Wei Wuxian accelerated as the dark vines matched his speed. Above the sky, Jiang Wanyin watched, worried about his brother.

Jiang Wanyin screamed internally, *'What the fuck are you doing watching him save that idiot? You could've stopped him!'*

Dark vines attacked and crashed here and there, but when he gets close to Su She, he immediately grabs him and the vines tears the boat into shreds.

"Seriously, Wei Wuxian, we can't be like you," Jin Zixuan says, his tone neither offending nor complimenting.

"He's just too good for everyone," Jiang Yanli says, her body trembling with nervousness, so Jin Zixuan drew her closer and Jin Ling holding her hand.

"Go, Senior Wei, go!" The disciples cheered, eliciting a soft laugh from Wei Wuxian.

Wei Wuxian's face became solemn as he continued to evade vines that were closing in on him. He dives into the water, desperate to escape the vines. By this point, his body was beginning to struggle, and he was losing his balance. Su She added to his struggle.

"Fucking dead weight!" exclaimed Jiang Wanyin, his hand clenched and teeth gritting in rage. In his hand, Zidian sparks.

"Just let him go!" An unknown cultivator also exclaimed.

"Wei Ying," Cangse Sanren mumbles, her heart racing. Wei Changze wrapped his arms around her. He, too, was worried for him. Their son will be just fine. He'll be just fine.

Wei Wuxian grits his teeth, "That damn creature is hard to tackle." He glances down to Su She. His grip on his robes was gradually loosening.

“Just drop him!” The cultivators chorused, and Wei Wuxian wished he had.

“Wei Wuxian, here!” Jiang Wanyin yelled, flying down to help him.

Wei Wuxian's expression finally softened and relaxed; a smile broke into his lips.

Lan Wangji’s heart accelerated. His husband’s smiles are so beautiful, and even in dangerous situations like this, he is still able to do it.

Wei Wuxian flies up, reaching out his hand to Jiang Wanyin's outstretched hand.

'You still didn't catch him,' Jiang Wanyin thinks to himself, cursing himself for not being faster.

Wei Wuxian kept smiling. The dark vines, however, emerged from the water. Wei Wuxian notices this and turns around, only to have his leg caught by it.

“No!” Wei Changze and Cangse Sanren shouted.

“Ah!” Wei Wuxian yelled as the vines pulled him down and fell off his sword.

“Wei Wuxian!!” Jiang Wanyin exclaimed.

“Ahhhh!”

Some cultivators became concerned. It wasn't just any creature that dragged him down, but the Waterborne Abyss—a powerful and vicious creature.

But then there was a glitch. As Wei Wuxian fell into the water, the surroundings changed. The surroundings had darkened and become eerie, with sharply shaped mountains that were clearly not their natural structure. Ghosts' voices echoed, and resentful energy permeated the air.

Qingheng-jun gasped, “W-What?”

“B-Burial Mounds?!” Cangse Sanren gaped incredulously at the screen.

“W-Why? Don’t tell me..” Wei Changze’s voice trailed off as he turns to face his son, who is now pale and shaking. No, there’s no way that happened, there’s just no way!

Jiang Wanyin and Lan Wangji’s face were aghast. They refused to believe Wei Wuxian had been thrown into the Burial Mounds. It was impossible; no one got out alive from there, but he returned three months later, looking so different and reeking of resentful energy. To see this now, they couldn’t help but tremble in anger and pain.

‘Wen Chao!’

The point of view switched to first person. A hand was stretched out, as if the person wanted to reach for something as he fell, but then the scene abruptly changed back to Wei Wuxian falling into the water.

The disciples and the cultivators were at a loss for words. Was that Wei Wuxian? They all asked themselves internally as they all look at him. The way he was shaking and paling confirmed that it was him. They couldn't help but be terrified.

“No, no way..” Sizhui’s body trembled, his eyes widened, as if he came to a realization.

Tears formed in the corners of Jiang Yanli's eyes. His sweet, sweet brother had been through a lot.

"A-Xian," Jiang Fengmian mumbled, his heart pounding with worry.

Underwater, the dark vines wrapped themselves around Wei Wuxian's body, dragging him deeper into the depths. The vines then crawled up to Wei Wuxian's mouth and crept into it, as if to devour and tear him apart from the inside.

Wei Wuxian opened his eyes and glanced at where he dropped Su She. The person in question was unconscious, the vines wrapping themselves around his body and dragging him into the depths as well. Afterwards, he disappeared.

"Just leave him alone and come out now!" yelled Nie Huaisang, drawing a lot of stares.

"Yeah, leave him!" Jingyi concurred.

"Please stop yelling; young Wei Wuxian can't hear you." Nie Mingjue says, matter-of-factly.

Wei Wuxian reached out his hand to Su She, but the vines drew him into the center of the cyclone, where a gigantic mass of resentful energy resides and dances. The scene faded briefly as the surroundings darkened.

The screen returns to showing Wei Wuxian floating inside the cyclone. Then, he suddenly recalled his words.

'Spiritual energy is energy, resentful energy is also energy. Why can't resentful energy be used as well?' **his voice echoed.** ***'If we could cultivate it, the areas teeming with it would no longer be forbidden.'***

“No!” Lan Qiren hissed. Wei Wuxian should have concentrated on getting himself to safety. Why is he still floating around and talking about resentful energy?

“Come on, do it! You’re obsessed with resentful energy, right? Show us—” The old man was not able to finish his words when Wen Qing slapped him across the face.

Some might have cringed at the loud slap. That hand will undoubtedly leave a mark on his cheek.

“Do you have any other things besides provoking people?” she hissed, her expression dark. “Zewu-jun, please silence him for a while,” she requests, and Lan Xichen gladly obliges.

Wei Wuxian’s lips trembled, *‘Resentful energy.’* He opened his eyes and slowly extended his hand. Dark whips of resentful energy gathered in his hands. As the dark vines crept closer to him, his eyes trembled, slowly losing his focus. The vines wanted Wei Wuxian to embrace them.

“Disgusting brat, you are inviting death to yourself! Stop doing that and come out!” Yu Ziyuan scolds, her face red with rage; the kid could have left the resentful energy alone, but instead he invited them himself! For such a smart kid, he is sometimes stupid!

Wei Wuxian flinced so hard, Lan Wangji glared at the Jiang Matriarch and held Wei Wuxian tightly.

“Let him explore resentful energy. After all, he will become the Yiling Patriarch in the future,” an unknown cultivator smirked.

“Oh, now you’re encouraging him?” Madam Jin scoffs, mockingly, "I thought you despised him?” she inquired, raising a brow.

“I do, but he’s—”

“We don't need a useless explanation from a worthless person,” Jin Ling interjected, and the man looked like he's about to explode. Jin Zixuan looked proud of his son, whereas Jiang Wanyin simply glared at his nephew, warning him to shut up and he complied. The disciples, however, gave him a thumbs up.

“Wei Wuxian!!” Jiang Wanyin’s scream echoed through the waters.

“Wei Wuxian!”

Although his sight is blurry, Wei Wuxian can make out two strands of white ribbon fluttered above the water. Then, hand reaches and grabbed Wei Wuxian’s collar. Finally, he was pulled out of the water, gasping for air and coughing.

Lan Wangji looked him down, hair and ribbon fluttering.

“Hanguang-jun saves the day!” The disciples cheered.

“Oh, thank god.” Jiang Yanli sighs, regaining his breath.

Cangse Sanren and Wei Changze saluted at Lan Wangji and smiled, “Thank you for saving him.”

“My pleasure,” he says, his lips quirking slightly.

Feeling bewilderment and relief, Wei Wuxian smiles at his savior and asks, “Lan Zhan, why did you grab my collar while saving me?” He tilts his head and closes his eyes, “I'm almost out of air!”

“Maybe if you had come out right away, you wouldn't have run out of air,” Jiang Wanyin interjected.

“Hanguang-jun, you should’ve carried Wei-xiong in your arms, not like that,” Nie Huaisang says, his fan covering half of his face. If he was to be saved, he wouldn't like being grabbed by the collar either.

“Yeah, look at Senior Wei, he’s struggling!” Zizhen dramatically sighs.

Lan Wangji ignored them. If he had carried him in his arms, he would have lost control.

Frowning, Lan Wangji responded, “I avoid physical contact with others.”

“Really, Wangji?” Lan Xichen teases, and his ears turned pink.

“From one to ten, how true is that sentence?” Madam Lan asks. She, like Xichen, enjoys teasing her son.

“Zero!” exclaimed Wei Wuxian as he hugged his husband.

Madam Lan and Lan Xichen laughed in response.

“We're already close; I'm not just another person to you.” Wei Wuxian declared.

“We’re not close.”

“Hanguang-jun, who are you tricking?” Nie Huaisang giggled, and Nie Mingjue glared at him, perplexed that his younger brother has begun teasing Lan Wangji when they weren't even that close in the past. Had their relationship improved?

“I bet Hanguang-jun already liked Wei Wuxian that time.”

“I know. A person who likes another person avoid them at times.”

“Of course! I was like that too.”

The female cultivators mumbled. Wei Wuxian smirked mischievously and whispered, “Hanguang-jun, did you hear that? Did you already like me in the past?”

A huff, “I already answered that.”

“Well, I still want to hear—”

“Yes,” he says, interrupting his husband, and Wei Wuxian laughs.

Time flies, and it was already sunset. Wei Wuxian was sitting on the edge of the boat, staring at his own reflection in the water with his brows furrowed. He lowers his gaze to the hand that attempted to use resentful energy.

The scene returns exactly to where the dark whips of resentful energy gathered in his hand.

He suddenly thought, was it right for him to manipulate such energy he was uncertain he could control? He had been interested with resentful energy, enough to discuss it in front of Lan Qiren. If he truly tried to manipulate it in order to save himself and the disciple he saved, what were the consequences? Would it corrupt him? Would controlling the said energy even for a second worth it?

He pondered on his own actions.

The cultivators were taken aback, especially Lan Qiren. He wasn't trying to manipulate the resentful energy just because he wanted to, he wanted to save himself and Su She.

“Don't talk nonsense; you clearly wanted to use resentful energy for your own advantage,” a man interjected. He was laughing while hearing Wei Wuxian’s thoughts.

“Then, gongzi, let me ask you,” Cangse Sanren says, her face solemn. “If you ran out of spiritual energy and were surrounded by only resentful energy, what would you do? Would you manipulate them to save yourself? Use them to your advantage? Or just simply die?”

The air in the temple thickened. Cangse Sanren was tempted to draw her sword and punish this man. Her son is already reflecting on his actions; why should he speak to provoke him?

“Of course, manipulate them to save myself,” the man replied quickly.

“Exactly. My son attempted to manipulate resentful energy because he had no other choice; he needed to save himself and the disciple.” Cangse Sanren says, her sword trembling in response to her irritation.

“He could've used his spiritual energy to pull himself out,” the man insisted, and some scoffed at his stupidity.

“Wei Ying is the only one in the center of the Waterborne Abyss. Because he is in the domain of resentful energy, it will overpower his spiritual power, rendering him unable to fight. As a result, he tries to manipulate them in an attempt to suppress them.” Lan Wangji explained. He had spent years understanding resentful energy with his husband in order to help him, and having knowledge about it can be useful at times.

The man remained silent, as if he had run out of words to fight with him, and Lan Wangji tries not to feel smug about it. Wei Wuxian's heart turned to mush. Has he ever mentioned how wonderful his husband is?

“He is correct,” says Baoshan Sanren. “Wei Wuxian could have suppressed the creature if he tried to manipulate the Waterborne abyss and knew how to control the resentful energy. You said he used the said energy to his advantage? He could have been, but it was only to save himself and the disciple.”

The temple has now fallen silent. Nobody dared to say anything. Who are they to argue with an immortal who specializes in both spiritual and resentful energy?

The disciples stuck their tongues out to the man.

Lan Xichen’s boat passed in the screen as he turned to stare at the damage the Waterborne Abyss made.

“Brother,” Lan Wangji began. “The Waterborne Abyss has not been purged. I’m afraid the townsmen would still suffer.” He said, and Lan Xichen straightened his posture.

“It is difficult to purge,” He responded. “We can only suppress it in Biling Lake temporarily until Uncle and the elders return, then make plans for it.”

Jiang Wanyin approaches his brother and hands back his sword, saying, “Here, I brought back your sword.”

“Huh?” He mumbles, finally snapping out of his reverie and grabbing his sword. “Thank you, Jiang Cheng,” he says, smiling.

Jiang Wanyin looked at his brother, “What are you thinking about?” he asked.

“Nothing much,” he says, throwing a rock into the river, “just thinking about the Waterborne Abyss.”

Jiang Wanyin scoffed, “Yeah right, and I’m thinking about getting married.”

“You’re not married?!” Jiang Fengmian and Yu Ziyuan gaped in disbelief. Their son is already the Sect Leader of Jiang Sect. He’s reached the proper age to get married, yet their son is unmarried?

“Ah, Jiang-zongzhu, Yu-furen, Jiang Cheng got blacklisted by all female cultivators after three blind dates,” Wei Wuxian revealed and laughs, and The Jiang Matriarch and Patriarch looked at their son, whose cheeks are stained red.

Jiang Yanli, being the sweet sister that she is, asked softly, “Oh, A-Cheng, why?”

“T-They did not fit my standards.” Jiang Wanyin admitted.

Despite his occasional outbursts of rage, this is the first time they've seen the Sect Leader so flustered and shy. It’s a strange and odd sight.

“Your standards were ridiculous, Jiang-xiong,” sighs Nie Huaisang, fanning himself.

“Fine, I'll look for your potential wife,” Yu Ziyuan declared, and Jiang Wanyin paled. Jin Ling had never seen his Uncle like this. He could only laugh along with Wei Wuxian.

‘Wen Qing really fits Jiang Cheng’s standards,’ Wei Wuxian thought. *‘But she's a Wen, and Yu-furen will not allow her to get close to his son.’* The memory will soon reveal their life in the Burial Mounds, as well as how much Wen Qing suffered. She is kind. He hopes she will see Wen Qing as a good woman and a potential partner for Jiang Wanyin.

“The Waterborne Abyss requires human sacrifices on a regular basis, sunken in ships, or it will wreak havoc. But for a body of water to spawn it, it must be plagued by drowning tragedies, accumulating vast resentful energy.” Wei Wuxian explained, and goes on, “But the townsfolk here are adept at swimming; how could its waters spawn a Waterborne Abyss?”

Knowing the answer, the cultivators sighed.

“Indeed,” Lan Xichen concurs.

Wei Wuxian adds, “It must have been driven here from somewhere else.”

He was, indeed, correct.

“Brother, has any place recently been troubled by a Waterborne Abyss?” Lan Wangji inquired, his frown deepening.

Lan Xichen sighs and grimly responds, "Yes," before staring at the sun. Wei Wuxian followed his gaze.

Qishan, Wen Clan.

The Wen siblings, and Sizhui flinched.

“Wen Clan is ridiculous!” A disciple grumbled. “They couldn't solve it and drove it away to torment others!”

“Wen Clan is like a blazing sun,” remarked an older disciple. “It is affiliated with more than half of the cultivation clans. Their clan is accustomed to being domineering. How can condemning them help?”

Wei Wuxian, who had been listening to the older disciple, suddenly stands up and says, “If the cultivation clans keep conniving them, it’ll surely lead to disaster!”

Yet they could not condemn the Wen Sect for their immoral acts because they are a powerful clan. If they hadn't been, all of the other clans would have joined together to eliminate them much sooner.

“So cruel!”

“I know right? I’m glad I was not born when the Sunshot Campaign happened.”

Yu Ziyuan recalled how the Wens attacked her home and how she was forced to fight alone until his husband arrived. She tried so hard to fight, but it wasn't enough, but she knows she did everything she could to defend her home. She will not forgive them for everything they did. She will definitely not forgive Wei Wuxian for causing chaos in their lives.

“Young Master Wei is right,” Lan Xichen sighs once more. “Most certainly.”

“It’s easy for Wei Ying to speak of it. If they can’t stand Wen Clan’s bullying, then just rebel by themselves! Why pull others along?” The Jin disciple paddling the boat said scornfully.

Cangse Sanren and Wei Changze scowled slightly.

“Punish that disciple, Madam Jin,” Yu Ziyuan hissed, and Madam Jin, of course, agreed.

“Well, if everyone only looks after his own hide, then it wouldn’t be long before the cultivation clans become Wen Clan’s lackeys.” Jin Zixuan countered.

“You're thinking far ahead, son," Madam Jin praised, and Jiang Yanli smiles. Oh, how his heart leapt. Even his son seemed pleased to hear that.

“I would've liked you if you weren't such a jerk before,” Wei Wuxian said, fighting the urge to roll his eyes. He was honestly relieved to hear that from him.

Jiang Wanyin settles beside his brother, “Nonconformity gets punished. Don't bring it up again,” he says, his face surprisingly calm.

Throwing his arms behind his head, Wei Wuxian says, “Yes, I know. To speak and act cautiously right?” He walks and turns his back to his brother, “But someone has to say it.”

A scoff, “You’re really—”

“Lad, take this!” A lady shouted from the side. The brothers turned, and Wei Wuxian easily caught the basket full of loquats. The lady proceeds to say, “Just a little thanks for saving us this morning!” She saluted in thanks, and Jiang Wanyin returned the salute with a smile.

Laughing, Wei Wuxian exclaimed, “Thank you for this great gift, sister!” And he winks. “Your looks are pretty, your gifts of loquats are sweet!”

Lan Wangji's brows did not twitch at all. Absolutely not.

Lan Xichen and Madam Lan both laughed softly when they noticed. It's endearing to see him getting jealous like this.

Jiang Yanli sighs fondly, “Oh, A-Xian.”

“It's as if his day won't be complete unless he gets to flirt once,” Jin Ling said unconsciously.

“Because it won't,” Jiang Wanyin deadpanned, drawing a laugh from Wei Wuxian.

“I enjoy seeing girls blush, which is why I do it; even Mianmian has blushed before!” He says and feels Lan Wangji tighten his grip on his waist. He smirked to himself.

Lan Wangji knows that his husband does this on purpose to make him jealous.

“Please don’t drag my name into this. I obviously did not.” She looks at Wei Wuxian, then at Lan Wangji, and notices his dark expression. She realizes that dark gaze isn't directed at her, but at Wei Wuxian. She sighs, “Stop that, I don’t want to die early. I still have a kid and a husband to come back to.” she flatly joked.

“You won’t, I’ll make sure of it,” Wei Wuxian throws a mischievous look at his husband.

Someone in the background may have gagged.

“Not as good-looking and sweet as you are!” The lady returned the flirtation.

Jiang Wanyin was in disbelief.

“Oh my god!” A female cultivator squealed.

“I wouldn't have the guts to flirt back. Props to her.”

Jiang Wanyin scowled, “Flirting around again.” Then Wei Wuxian tossed him a loquat and caught it.

Wei Wuxian laughs heartily as he ignores his brother's accusation and says, "Piss off." His smile fades as his eyes find Lan Wangji standing perfectly behind his brother. His smile then reappears, but this time it is more mischievous, a perfect scheme formed in his mind.

“I don’t like that smile. That smile is scheming,” Wen Qing grumbled. She's always aware that most of Wei Wuxian's smiles are mischievously scheming, but those smiles are only frequently directed at A-Yuan because he enjoys pranking the child so much. He even buried him in the dirt and tricked the child. There was also a time when he called corpses because A-Yuan was sad and needed friends, and A-Yuan cried because he was scared. She would never again entrust Wei Wuxian with children.

“Well, he's Wei Wuxian, there's never a day when he won't do some mild scheming and stuff,” Nie Huaisang says wistfully. He longed doing pranks with Wei Wuxian. Being with him was the time he ever felt happy and free. It didn't matter if he was going to get caught or if his brother would be mad at him as long as he had a good time. But after he returned and set his plans in motion, and people discovered that he was a two-faced bitch, he and Wei Wuxian became awkward. There's an uneasy tension between them.

Wei Wuxian moves and points to Lan Wangji's form, “Sister, do you find him good-looking?” He shouted.

Lan Wangji huffs fondly as Wei Wuxian whispers, “Very much.” His husband constantly compliments him on his appearance, but he is still not used to hear it. It causes his heart to race so fast that he could pass out at any moment. Yes, he is being dramatic, but that is how he truly feels, much like how his husband used to *say ‘Warn me every time you say sweet things, my heart cannot take it!’*

Because of Wei Wuxian’s loud voice, Lan Wangji turns to him, only to see the other pointing at him and hearing several ladies say, “Even more good-looking!”

Lan Wangji was baffled, but still glared at him. Wei Wuxian sees the glare and laughs. He really like seeing him react like that. “Then praise him some more! Don’t you think he’s much cuter?”

“Ugh,” Jiang Wanyin groans, facepalming, “what is wrong with you?”

“A-Cheng, besides A-Xian, someone is going to tease you soon,” Jiang Yanli laughs, and Jin Zixuan snorts, drawing the Jiang siblings' attention to him.

Jiang Wanyin glared, “What are you laughing at, peacock?”

“I'm sorry, but it's difficult to imagine anyone teasing him other than Wei Wuxian,” he says, snorting again. Nearby, Wei Wuxian is snickering. He has to agree with the peacock. Imagine a blushing, flustered Jiang Cheng? No, it’s too much—it feels so wrong, cursed even.

Jiang Wanyin was torn between punching him and leaving him alone for the sake of his sister. Even Jin Ling is laughing at him!

“I hate all of you.”

“We love you too, A-Cheng!”

Lan Wangji averts his gaze, refusing to be teased. Lan Xichen laughed, and the young Jiang Wanyin mirrored the current Jiang Wanyin's reaction.

“Someone give him more! If I’m the only one getting these, he might be jealous with me~!”

“He's more jealous of the ladies than the loquats,” Nie Mingjue muttered, amusement dancing in his eyes. He has the highest regard for Wei Wuxian's unrivaled shamelessness. He wonders if anyone could match his shamelessness. Probably none.

“Hey Lan Zhan, your Gusu dialect sounds lovely; teach me how to curse in it!”

“Pathetic.”

Lan Qiren threw Wei Wuxian a look that said, *‘Are you serious, Wei Wuxian?’*

Jingyi, who had a sudden idea, smiles and says, "Don't worry Senior Wei, if Hanguang-jun doesn't teach you, I will. I know quite a few Gusu—”

“Do not!” Lan Qiren cuts him off, so he immediately shuts up and backs away. An angry Grandmaster is someone he does not want to mess with. Who knows how many punishments he'll face after breaking so many rules?

“Don’t be such a killjoy, Lan Qiren. Let Wei Ying learn.” Cangse Sanren wiggled her brows to tease him, clearly making him even angrier.

“It is against the—“

“Yeah, yeah, I know!”

After saying that, Lan Wangji’s gaze drifted back to the basket of loquats in Wei Wuxian’s arms. Lan Xichen noticed this and said quietly, “Wangji, I see that you want some loquats. Why not buy a whole basket?”

“No,” Lan Wangji replied emphatically.

“I want the ones from Wei Ying,” **he says internally and the scene fades.**

Lan Xichen laughed, knowing what his brother was thinking. Though it is still preferable to hear it for oneself.

“Ha! That was Hanguang-jun’s thought!” Jingyi cheered, as if the mere thought of hearing their Hanguang-jun’s thoughts was enough to make him celebrate.

“You wanted—” sighs Wei Wuxian, “you could've asked one from me.” Wei Wuxian smirked. That's why he didn't want to ask Wei Wuxian for a loquat because he'd be teased after.

“That concludes the scene for the time being,” Baoshan Sanren says as she walks over to Wei Wuxian to hand him her brush. “Let’s bring back Xiao Xingchen, Song Lan, and A-Qing,” she says, and Wei Wuxian nods decisively. He takes up the brush and begins to scribble in the talisman he received from Jin Ling.

“While Wei Wuxian’s is occupied, I’m going to say this to all of you,” The cultivators braced themselves because, for some reason, the Immortal looks quite mad. “Do not speak negatively about resentful energy or question Wei Wuxian's manipulation of it. As someone who has control over it, it irritates me that some of you refuse to see and accept its benefits.”

They all felt like they're being scolded by their mother.

“I want you to all be open-minded. This is no longer the Sui Era,” she adds, looking at each cultivator who refuses to meet her gaze. She is starting to regret inviting them here. But they all needed to see, she wants them to realize all their wrongdoings in the past and be guilty, enough for them to enter seclusion.

A man bravely spoke, “We just can’t be open-minded if the topic is resentful energy. It’s unorthodox, and evil!”

Baoshan Sanren's glare became more intense, and the man began to regret his words.

“What a shame then,” she said, sending a wave of spiritual energy towards the man with a flick of her fingers. The cultivators shouted and scrambled away, but the man in question was caught in the wave of spiritual energy. He screamed and then vanished right in front of them.

“W-What…?”

“W-Where did he go?!”

“I kicked him out,” the immortal said, turning back to Wei Wuxian, who is focused solely on the talisman. They all gaped at her, at a loss of words.

Nope, they were never speaking again if they were going to be kicked out like that.

“Perhaps I'm manipulating you all to be open-minded, but I don't care; All of you just needed to see and know what the world is keeping from you.”

Yu Ziyuan clenched her teeth; she didn't like this at all. If she hadn't been immortal, she would have fought her right now.

“I am finished,” Wei Wuxian says as he stands up and hands the talisman to Baoshan Sanren. She looks at it with satisfaction before moving away. Then, the talisman floats in front of her, shining brightly. alongside the talisman, another array materialized.

‘Just how powerful is this woman?’ They all asked internally. But, then again, why are they asking this? For Pete's sake, she's the Legendary Immortal.

Moments later, three people emerged from the array, and the disciples cheered.

“A-Qing!”

Xiao Xingchen was said to be blind because he offered his eyes to his friend, but the Xiao Xingchen in front of them was not blind; he had a pair of mesmerizing chocolate eyes.

“Where are we?” Song Lan asked, baffled. They were just walking when an array appeared and transported them here. He looks at the swarm of cultivators and he sees Lan Wangji and Wei Wuxian.

“Wei Wuxian? Lan Wangji?”

He was not able to approach the couple when Xiao Xingchen gripped his shoulders, “S-Song Lan, I can see…..I can see….” Xiao Xingchen’s voice trailed off, feeling tears in the corners of his eyes.

“Daozhang, you have eyes now! Thank goodness!” A-Qing hugged him tightly, and the man returned the hug even tighter.

Song Lan was in disbelief, “H-How did..”

“Xiao Xingchen..”

That voice was so familiar that Xiao Xingchen couldn't help but turn his head in the direction of the voice, where he saw the woman he hadn't seen in years. He let go of A-Qing and walked over to her, kneeling on the floor.

“G-Grandmaster...” His tears streamed down his cheeks. Baoshan Sanren’s features softened.

“My child, welcome back.”

Chapter End Notes

And so the story concludes!.....for now, of course. It's terrible, right? I think so too. I rushed to finish this so that I could publish it today.

As for Qingheng-jun and Madam Lan, I know they're are a little OOC here because they have some issues in the canon, but don't worry, I'll make sure the two of them, as well as Yu Ziyuan and Jiang Fengmian, talk about their issues soon to fix their relationship.

So, for the next chapter, I may take a little longer to publish because I have a lot on my plate, but I'm confident it won't be long before I update, so I hope you all can wait patiently.

Another thing is that I have another fan art, and it's Baoshan Sanren! You can check it out after reading.

Thank you so much!

Corpses

Chapter Notes

Hiii, I am back again with another chapter. Enjoy reading!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Xiao Xingchen's cheeks were flushed with tears. He couldn't believe he was standing right in front of his Grandmaster. No, he couldn't believe he was seeing her now. He's supposed to be blind for the rest of his life because he lost his eyes. He had given up it up for his friend, and now he was staring at her beautiful grandmaster, whom he hadn't seen in years. His body and lips trembled, his breath is rapid, and with great difficulty, he asked, “W-What….Why are you here, Grandmaster? W-Why am I here? Why can I see anything?”

The anguish and bafflement in Xiao Xingchen’s expression broke Baoshan Sanren’s heart. Years of solitude in an abundant but lonely mountain made her realize how much she missed company. She missed her students so much. Slowly, she slowly raised her hand and caressed Xiao Xingchen's cheek, as if he were the most delicate thing she had ever touched. Then her gaze went down further to his slashed neck.

She recalled how much blood flowed from his neck; it was both horrifying and sad. She couldn't believe her student had committed suicide, but she understood why he did it, yet it still hurt her. Xiao Xingchen was anything but cruel, and Xue Yang simply took advantage of his kindness and blindness. She will never be forgiven him.

“Thanks to Wei Wuxian's talisman, I've brought you three back,” She softly responded. Xiao Xingchen sniffs and turns to face Wei Wuxian, who is now staring at the three with melancholy in his eyes.

Song Lan and A-Qing approached the Immortal and bowed. Baoshan Sanren gave them a small nod before the two straightened their posture. “Wei Wuxian’s talisman?” Song Lan inquired. He knew he was brilliant, but he couldn't wrap his head around the fact that the immortal had brought them back thanks to his invention. Just what in the world did he invent again?

“Yes, Time-Travel Talisman,” Baoshan Sanren responded once more, and the three gasped in disbelief.

“T-Time-Travel?! Isn’t that impossible? How is that possible?!” A-Qing asked in stupefaction.

“I just aim to do the impossible,” Wei Wuxian said with a shy grin.

A-Qing, still caught in disbelief, exclaimed, “That’s not the point, just how smart are you?!”

Many disciples snorted in the background, not because of A-Qing, but because her question was so relatable. Like how can one obnoxious and mischievous person be so intelligent and skilled?

Then again, Perhaps A-Qing should not be surprised at all. Wei Wuxian was astute enough to notice that Xue Yang was impersonating Xiao Xingchen in Yi City.

But still..

Turning back, Xiao Xingchen wipes his tears and asked, “Why are we here? Why I can see, Grandmaster?”

Baoshan Sanren then proceeds to explain to them how they were dragged to the future. After she finished explaining, the three were in a daze, slowly digesting the information that seemed impossible to comprehend but also left them in awe. Wei Wuxian created yet another magnificent talisman.

“So we were dragged here before our deaths, but how come we remember our deaths when we were dragged here before our deaths?” Song Lan asked, a perplexed expression painted on his face.

Those who were brought back turned solemn. That was an excellent question that no one had thought to ask.

“The array provides a small play of episodic memory containing information or memory on what has happened between your deaths, where, and when it happened in your first life,” explains Baoshan Sanren, and everyone nods slowly, still comprehending the somewhat complex information. Wei Wuxian, on the other hand, was completely taken aback. It never ceases to astound him how the immortal can also accomplish the impossible. He assumes the immortal accomplished more impossible feats than he did, and he aspires to do even more in the future.

Song Lan was relieved that he was no longer a fierce corpse, but he was mostly relieved that his friend, Xiao Xingchen, with his eyes back, and his little companion, A-Qing, were here, alive and well.

“Cangse Sanren,” Baoshan Sanren calls out, “come here.”

She approaches them and gave a respective bow before facing the said man. She had been looking forward to meeting her shidi, and just by looking at the man, she could tell that he has a soft personality. Gentle on the outside but determined on the inside. She also noticed how his chocolate eyes shone brightly and gently.

“Xiao Xingchen, this is Cangse Sanren, your shijie,” Baoshan Sanren introduces, and Cangse Sanren gave the man a small nod and a smile. Xiao Xingchen followed suit and bowed.

“It’s nice to finally meet you, Shijie.”

Xiao Xingchen could stare at her shijie and he would instantly distinguish that she has a high level of cultivation. Her outstanding cultivation was said to be well-known among her grandmaster's disciples even after she left this mountain. She also has an aura similar to his son, Wei Wuxian, that he could not help but smile more. Respectfully, Song Lan and A-Qing bowed at Cangse Sanren, and Cangse Sanren gladly returned the bow.

“You too, shidi,” she says, turning to face Wei Changze and points at him. “That is my husband, Wei Changze.”

Xiao Xingchen and Wei Changze exchanged bows.

“Go there, the viewing will start soon.”

The three then blended into the crowd. Several cultivators greeted them, while A-Qing was surrounded by a swarm of disciples who grinned at her as if her presence added color to their world. Their excitement baffled her, yet she couldn't deny that the unexpected attention made her happy.

“Miss A-Qing, it’s great to see you again!”

“You are so pretty, Miss A-Qing!”

“Oh, the color of your eyes are so unique!”

And the compliments kept coming. It was too much for her. She could only laugh and laugh. She couldn’t believe she’s alive again instead of being a ghost. Honestly, she would have preferred to stay as a ghost since she had no purpose in life after avenging her Daozhang, Xiao Xingchen, but it felt so good to touch and laugh with people again.

While Wei Wuxian and Lan Wangji talked to their parents on the side, Xiao Xingchen and Song Lan approached them slowly. Once the two noticed their presence, they turned face them.

“Wei Wuxian, Hanguang-jun,” Xiao Xingchen began, and both men bowed. “Thank you so much for what you both did at Yi City,” Song Lan concludes.

Wei Wuxian shuffles slightly, uneasy at seeing them bow in front of him. “It’s no problem,” he said with a light chuckle. “I only did a little while Hanguang-jun did the majority of the work.”

“We both did the work equally, Wei Ying,” Lan Wangji protests, a small frown forming on his face.

Xiao Xingchen nods, “Yes, I agree with Hanguang-jun.”

Leaving the two, Madam Lan turns to his husband and grabs his wrist gently, pulling him away from them. “Qingheng-jun,” she began. “We have a lot to talk about, and I would like us to talk after the viewing ends,” she requested, her head lowered. They are fully aware that they had been acting amiably since being brought back, but they both knew there was still tension between them.

Qingheng-jun stares, seemingly enamored by her wife’s beauty, and smiles sadly. “Of course, whatever you want, my lady,” he responds gently and Madam Lan looks up to him, offering him the most beautiful smile he had missed so much.

Not far from them, Lan Qiren and Lan Xichen observed the two. Lan Qiren objected to them talking privately while he’s not included, but Lan Xichen stopped him from interfering. He was aware that his uncle was still upset with them, but he couldn't afford to have his uncle interfere with such a private matter that only his parents should discuss. Only then, when they’re finished, could they interrupt.

Jiang Fengmian observed Cangse Sanren, Wei Changze, and Xiao Xingchen conversing, as if the three were making up for lost time. Unconsciously, his hand reached inside his robes and touched a small wooden box. A smile formed on his lips, and he reached for Yu Ziyuan's wrist, startling her with the unexpected contact. Yu Ziyuan frowned as she sees his husband smile. That smile was not one of happiness, but one of sadness, a smile full of melancholy. She was perplexed as to why he suddenly touched her when he rarely did so. She was about to yank her wrist away when the grip tightened.

“Fengmian, let go of me—”

“San-niang, let's talk for a minute,” he interrupted, causing Yanli and Jiang Cheng to exchange glances, anxious that the two would fight again. “Please,” Fengmian pleads and Yu Ziyuan’s features unexpectedly softened. The Jiang siblings were taken aback. They wouldn't have noticed the subtle change in emotion on their mother's face if they hadn't been watching the two.

"Fine," she said as Jiang Fengmian excused themselves and led her to a secluded area of the temple. For the first time, Yu Ziyuan was feeling nervous. What could they be talking about for them to stay away from the cultivators? Was he trying to avoid them because he is ashamed of her?

Just imagining this makes her blood boil.

The two came to a halt, and Jiang Fengmian turned to face her.

“Spill it, Fengmian,” She hissed. “I don't have time to waste on such trivial matters.”

Jiang Fengmian sighs and pulls a wooden box from his robes. Yu Ziyuan looked at it, puzzled, before moving her gaze up to his eyes. Caressing the surface of the box, his hand slowly slides it open. Inside was a beautifully crafted jade hair stick. Yu Ziyuan's mouth gaped slightly. This was the same jade hair stick he had given her before he left Lotus Pier.

She recalled not accepting the gift, when in reality, she desperately wanted to. Jiang Fengmian sporadically gives her gifts, and the jade stick was particularly lovely, but she let her pride wash over her and lashed out on him that day. She did not regret doing so, but one thing she regretted was not accepting such gift Lotus Pier scarcely had.

“Even if you do not accept this, I will still give this to you; this is for you, and only yours, San-niang.” Jiang Fengmian said softly as he carefully removed the hair stick from the box. He took her hand in his and placed the hair stick in it. He lingers momentarily before lowering his hand. Yu Ziyuan was torn between shock and irritation.

“I don’t need this!” She returns the hair stick back to him, but he shakes his head. Gritting her teeth, she seethes, “Just tell me what you want to say right now! I know this is not what you

want to—”

“We still have a lot to talk about, but the viewing will be up soon, so I'd like to talk after,” Jiang Fengmian cuts her off.

“Fine!” Yu Ziyuan scowled. “We’ll talk later, but I won’t accept this!”

“San-niang—”

“Fengmian!” she exclaimed, becoming increasingly irritated. “Do you think I’d lower my pride and accept that? Do you think I’d soften over a hair stick?!” She rejected the gift long ago, and she will absolutely reject it again; why can't he just understand that?

Jiang Fengmian stares at her in the eye, as if searching for an answer to what he’s looking for. Yu Ziyuan tries to control her expression, careful not give away any emotion that will push him to give the gift. Seemingly not getting the answer he wanted, he sighs, and Yu Ziyuan resisted the urge to scoff.

Who was she kidding? Jiang Fengmian easily gives up. He will leave the any matter as it is, unresolved, and this is what she absolutely despises about him. Despite her temperament, she wanted her husband to force her to talk, so any unresolved matter could be resolved. For instance, this situation they are in right now. She wants him to do something, anything that will force her to give in, to accept the gift, but as a woman with pride, this is difficult. It's extremely difficult.

With great difficulty, Jiang Fengmian spoke, “San-niang, if there’s one thing I regretted the most, it is when I did not force you to accept this, and leaving Lotus Pier.”

Yu Ziyuan's eyes widened in surprise.

“I should never have given up; I shouldn't have left you and the children at Lotus Pier,” he said, his voice tinged with sadness and guilt.

“Even if you hadn't left, Fengmian, we were doomed to die. Don’t talk as if you could’ve saved me.”

A defeated sigh escaped Jiang Fengmian’s lips. “I know, but I could’ve tried harder.”

Yu Ziyuan was at a loss for words; the words *‘tried harder’* and *‘Jiang Fengmian’* do not fit together. His husband does not try harder because he’s a coward. That was something she had noticed about him a long time ago, but for him to be honest and admit it in front of her was shocking. She was convinced that another soul was inhabiting her husband's body because this was not how he normally talks.

“I don't want us to fight anymore, San-niang. We'll talk about it later. We will discuss everything, and I promise to listen to you, so I hope you will listen to me as well,” he said, a determined expression on his face.

Yu Ziyuan looked at him for a moment, ready to lash out again, but she couldn't find her own voice or the urge to do so. Her treacherous heart wanted them to reconcile because, like him, she is tired of their constant fighting as well, but her mind says otherwise. She lowers her gaze and caresses the jade hair stick in her hand with her thumb.

“Why did you buy this useless thing?”

“This hair stick looks clear and lustrous. I found it pretty, so I brought it.”

She figures listening to her heart isn't so bad.

“Alright,” She says, a bit too sternly, that Jiang Fengmian resists the urge to smile. He's relieved, so much so that he cracked a smile when he sees her hiding the hair stick in her robes. He figures that hiding it is preferable to not accepting it. It is enough.

Jiang Wanyin and Jiang Yanli were concerned. They keep shuffling and turning back to where their parents had headed. They've been gone for a while now, and they haven't returned yet.

“A-Jie, what if they’re fighting again?” Jiang Wanyin wondered, his voice tinged with worry and fear.

“We didn't hear any shouting, so maybe they did not,” Jiang Yanli said as she held her younger brother's hand. On the side, Jin Ling and Jin Zixuan were anxious as well.

A moment later, Jiang Patriarch and Matriarch emerged. Yu Ziyuan crossed her arms with a scowl akin to her son’s, but this time, it was less threatening, while Jiang Fengmian was smiling. The Jiang siblings, Jin Ling, and Jin Zixuan were taken aback.

Jiang Wanyin blinked a few times. “A-Jie, am I seeing things correctly?”

“No, A-Cheng,” Yanli says, a smile breaking on her lips as well. This was a promising sign. “We're seeing it correctly.”

“Yu-Furen just got scarier,” mumbles Jin Zixuan, earning a light slap from his son.

“Dad, don’t say that,” Jin Ling reprimanded. “What if she’ll get mad at you again?”

“Right, sorry,” His son just sound so much like her wife just now.

“Sit down, the viewing will begin,” Baoshan Sanren announces, and the screen lights up. Everyone eventually settles back into their seats.

It was night time in Cloud Recesses. Rain disturbing the tranquillity of Gusu.

“Waterborne Abyss is formed by resentful energy from the watercourse,” Lan Wangji explained, his voice echoing. The scene shifts inside a room where Lan Wangji is writing his hunting report. “Once full-fledge, it is extremely difficult to exorcise. The water body has to be drained, emptied of it sunken materials, and then exposed under the sun for 3 to 5 years. Only then can it be eradicated. Not a task for common manpower.”

“Remember Hanguang-jun’s words, kids!” Wei Wuxian exclaimed, earning multiple nods from the disciples.

“Yes, Senior Wei!” They chorused, with Jingyi and Zizhen being the loudest. Lan Qiren resisted the urge to silence them.

“Note that down too.”

“Do you have any talismans left?”

“I have one, here.”

“Thank you!”

Many cultivators laughed, amused by the disciples enthusiasm.

In the buildings, a person dashes and jumps, disappearing into the darkness. This made Lan Wangji pause. His amber's eyes shifted to the right where Wei Wuxian just passed. Brought outside, a black robe man runs through the corridors, holding two jars of Emperor's Smile in his hands.

“He’s breaking the rules again,” Some disciples giggled.

Lan Qiren and Yu Ziyuan shot Wei Wuxian a glare, while the man just laughed sheepishly. Emperor's Smile is such a good wine, naturally he’ll want more.

Lan Qiren exclaimed, “Why do you always break the rules when following them is so simple?!”

“Grandmaster Lan,” Wei Wuxian whines. “For someone like me, it’s easier to break them than follow them. Besides, you should try Emperor’s Smile; it’s really good!” Wei Wuxian suggested, and the old man's glare became even more intense.

“Alcohol is forbidden!”

“Shouting is forbidden too, you know,” Cangse Sanren adds, eliciting snorts from Lan Xichen and Wei Wuxian.

Lan Qiren is just done.

Wei Wuxian runs with a smile on his lips, feeling proud having succeeded in sneaking in the wines he'd been craving for days, but then—

“Stop right there.”

And Wei Wuxian came to a sudden halt. He was not stupid enough not recognize that voice. He knew very well who had come to stop him. He turns and sees Lan Wangji not far away, holding an umbrella to keep dry from the rain.

Jingyi chuckles, “How fast are you, Hanguang-jun? A moment ago you were just inside the room—”

“If its Wei Wuxian he has to catch, even a teleportation array cannot match his speed,” Jiang Wanyin states unequivocally. Lan Wangji has always been fast. Fast enough to catch his brother when he faints, trust him, find him, and steal his brother away from him. Anyway, he just wondered what his brother possessed that made Lan Wangji fall for him.

Wei Wuxian laughs, “Jiang Cheng, you’re exaggerating.”

“I’m not.”

“He’s not.”

Lan Wangji and Jiang Wanyin said simultaneously, and Jiang Yanli couldn’t help but giggle when her brother’s cheeks stained pink.

“Ah, I'm really envious of their relationship,” a female cultivator said dreamily, drawing several nods from her companions.

Wei Wuxian stilled when Lan Wangji slowly approached him. His gaze falls to the two jars of wine he's holding before hastily hiding it behind his back and letting out a nervous laugh.

“Lan Zhan,” he greets. “What a coincidence.”

“Coincidence, indeed.” Nie Mingjue remarked, the corner of his lips quirked up in amusement.

“Go take your punishment,” Lan Wangji says calmly.

With a dramatic gasp, Wei Wuxian responded, “Come one, we’re already so close. Do me a favour and let this slide?”

“Why is he so undisciplined?” A man says with a scowl on his face, “He could’ve just waited until morning to buy that.”

A slightly younger man objected, saying, “I've tasted Emperor's Smile before, and honestly, it was so good, I don't blame him for buying it.”

“That's not the point; the point is him sneaking it in at night in Cloud Recesses.”

“Right.”

Lan Qiren mentally nods his head in agreement.

But then, a frighteningly loud unsheathing of sword echoed in the air. Lan Wangji had already drawn Bichen out. The blades’ glare illuminated the surroundings.

“W-Wangji?” exclaimed Madam Lan and Qingheng-jun, surprised.

“Hanguang-jun, no!” The disciples chorused. “Don’t attack Senior Wei again!”

Wei Wuxian couldn’t help but roll his eyes at the disciples’ dramatic yelling. “Come on, it’s not like it was an intense battle.”

“I would’ve attempted to draw my sword too, if he’s going to be this stubborn.” Jin Zixuan says, and Madam Jin huffs in amusement.

“You were stubborn in your childhood too, Zixuan. You're in no position to speak.”

Jin Zixuan wilted in place. Jin Ling, Yanli, and Jiang Wanyin resisted the urge to snort.

Wei Wuxian gaped in disbelief. “Hey, do you have to do this? There are only two of us here. None of us speak of it, and nobody would know, right?” He inquired, and Lan Wangji refused to listen, making him even tenser as Bichen is still pointed at him. “I assure you that there won’t be a next time!”

Lan Wangji's frown deepened, and he attacks.

The sword clanged, as if there were two swords that had collided. Seconds later, Wei Wuxian runs out of the corridor and slides to a halt across the wet grass before fleeing in an attempt to escape. He's not about to have another late-night sparring match with the second jade. Lan Wangji, on the other hand, was fast. He outran him, and swung Bichen, and before Wei Wuxian knew it, Lan Wangji's sword was resting against his exposed neck. One wrong move and his neck will be sliced.

Many cultivators scrutinized their gaze to observe the couple’s moves. Like before, Wei Wuxian's sword is not with him, but his ability to effortlessly avoid Lan Wangji's attack without being hurt is astounding. It would’ve been better if Wei Wuxian brought his sword with him.

They are eager to see how they fight with their swords and full power. What they're seeing right now is already incredible. Who knows how incredible it will be if they both fight seriously?

“Move, Wei Wuxian,” Wen Qing mumbled, slightly concerned. Lan Wangji could sever his neck at any time. Just picturing Wei Wuxian with blood is horrifying that she couldn’t help but remember how she cut Wei Wuxian open and blood was everywhere; in the bed, in her hands, in A-Ning’s hands, just everywhere, while he screams in pain and agony.

She takes a deep breath, and Wen Ning, noticing how his sister is behaving oddly, holds her hand as she looks at her with concern.

“I’m fine, A-Ning.”

As if he knew what she was thinking, Wen Ning smiled. “Don't worry, A-Jie; he'll be fine.”

Wei Wuxian, now drenched in rain, looked down at the blade and remained still. Raindrops hit the blade, creating a low ringing noise.

“Take your punishment,” Lan Wangji warns, his voice barely audible.

Wei Wuxian swallowed nervously as raindrops slide down to the expanse of his pale neck.

Madam Jin clicks her tongue. “Just go take your punishment, Wei Wuxian,” Whether he escaped or not, he was already apprehended by Lan Wangji, and the second jade will undoubtedly inform the Old Man Lan that he sneaked in. She was just wondering why he was desperate to escape when he'd already been apprehended, and worse, making an excuse to the second jade, knowing the latter would not accept such a ridiculous excuse.

“If I were punished that night, Huaisang, Jiang Cheng, and I would not be able to drink,” Wei Wuxian shrugged, as if drinking was more important than a simple punishment waiting for him the next morning. Honestly, he didn't mind being punished, but the problem is that his husband got punished as well, all because of him. Why did he think dragging him through his mess was a good idea?

“Huaisang..”

“Jiang Cheng..”

Yu Ziyuan and Nie Mingjue simultaneously glared at them, and both boys immediately avoided their gaze. Because this has already occurred, apologizing is not even an option. Yu Ziyuan stared at his son’s back for a moment before scoffing, preferring to not scold him. Nie Mingjue, on the other hand, continued glaring at his brother, prompting the younger to step away from him.

Jin Ling was in disbelief. His angry uncle breaking rules and drinking with Wei Wuxian late at night? It’s unbelievable considering he prefers not to get in trouble, but it appears that his

uncle also wanted to have fun with Wei Wuxian in the past, so he mostly joins in on Wei Wuxian's antics. In comparison to their younger counterparts and the present, the present are less likely to do this since his angry uncle is awkward and angry as fuck, as always, and is also a Sect Leader with responsibilities, unlike Wei Wuxian.

In a hurry, Wei Wuxian stammered, "O-Okay, alright. Your sword is overpowering. I'll take my punishment, okay?"

Lan Wangji locked his gaze on him for a moment before retracting his sword.

Knowing her son, Cangse Sanren giggled. "I would not retract that sword, if I were you, Lan Wangji."

"Mn," Lan Wangji agreed, nodding his head in response. "I should've known better," he admitted, his lips quirking up.

A bit shocked that the second jade listened to him, Wei Wuxian smirked and bolted.

Jiang Wanyin groaned and facepalms, while Jiang Yanli couldn't help but smile fondly.

"You—" He cut his sentence short and chased after Wei Wuxian. The other man halted in the corridor, tossing the other jar into the air before leaping up pillar after pillar, twisting effortlessly yet gracefully in the air before reaching and landing perfectly on the top roof with both jars in hand.

Thinking he'd escaped from Lan Wangji, he smiled, but it faltered instantly once he saw him ahead of him, his back to Wei Wuxian. Lan Wangji had already awaited him.

"W-Wha—" A-Qing gaped in disbelief, "but a moment ago, he was just—" She did not finish her sentence and simply stared at the screen. He witnessed the fight between Hanguang-jun and Xue Yang in Yi City. Though Xue Yang was an excellent fighter, quick to dodge attacks

and defend himself, he was not in par with Hanguang-jun's speed and power. No wonder he was so good; he's already this good at such a young age.

"That's Hanguang-jun for you!" grinned Jingyi, though it was a smug grin. Who wouldn't be blown away by their Hanguang-jun? No one.

Jingyi's enthusiasm made Lan Xichen, Madam Lan, and Qingheng-jun laugh. Lan Qiren, on the other hand, appeared pleased with his nephew's quick reaction.

"You're not escaping Hanguang-jun now, Wei Wuxian," Mianmian smirked, but Wei Wuxian simply stuck his tongue out.

Under the rain and darkness, Lan Wangji looked like a travelling immortal gazing at the mountainous view of Gusu. In an instant, he turned around, shooting Wei Wuxian a glare that was barely visible due to the darkness, but Wei Wuxian knew he was glaring at him.

Young Wei Wuxian gaping at young Lan Wangji made every cultivator burst out laughing. It was an absolutely priceless reaction.

"He's going to run away again, isn't he?" Xiao Xingchen whispered beside Song Lan, who was awestruck by what he was seeing right now.

"Of course he is, Daozhang,"A-Qing responded with a scoff.

Predicting A-Qing words, Wei Wuxian bolted again.

Once again, Lan Wangji pursued him. He tried to take the jars from Wei Wuxian's hands, but Wei Wuxian smoothly evaded his grasp. They circled and twisted around each other, continuing to avoid each other.

“Hey! I already assured that there won’t be a next time! Why are you so persistent?!” Wei Wuxian yells, frustration washing over him.

Lan Wangji ignored him and continued chasing after him, reaching for the jars in his hand, but as before, Wei Wuxian evaded his grasp. When Lan Wangji crouched down and performed a kick, Wei Wuxian effectively jump up, eliciting a deeper glare from the second jade. Lan Wangji wasted no time in delivering another high kick, causing the jar in Wei Wuxian's grasp to fall.

“Oh that was so good! How are they both so good?” remarked a female cultivator, her eyes sparkling as if she had just witnessed a life-changing phenomena.

“Hah! Hanguang-jun finally got you, Senior Wei!” Jingyi smirked, earning a light slap from Sizhui.

“Now he only has one jar of wine,” Zizhen said, shaking his head. “Poor Senior Wei.”

“Please worry about Xian-health gege's more than the wine,” Sizhui interjected, worried, “he's literally soaked in the rain.”

Jiang Wanyin has been staring at the screen intently for a while now. He, like Lan Wangji, will most likely have difficulty capturing his brother. Lotus Pier’s training was difficult. One of the trainings that had been taught was how to successfully evade an enemy's attack. He had sparred with his brother several times and had always lost because he lacked in some areas and his brother was so good.

It was amazing to witness how, despite being a reckless person, his brother is extremely meticulous and tactical. He observes and analyzes his opponents while staying out of their reach until he gets a grasp on things, at which point he goes in for the kill. Perhaps that’s how he's been beaten every time because he plans his tactics ahead of time and his brother is utterly unpredictable on the battlefield, resulting in him being overwhelmed and losing. From the side, he could see his father's disapproval but proud smile, while his mother scowled. His sister, on the other hand, is content to watch.

“Look, you’re so good, A-Ying! I and your Dad might challenge you to a sparring match soon,” Cangse Sanren says, smiling and sending a wink to his son.

“Forget about that; he and Lan Wangji aren't done yet,” Wei Changze interjected, shifting his gaze from his son to the screen, then back to his son. He had been silent, but he had clearly noticed something he should have noticed since the previous scenes. He is also aware that he is not alone; his wife noticed as well.

“Aren’t those Jiang Sect’s moves?” Zizhen inquired of a Jiang disciple beside him, who nodded.

“Can Sect Leader Jiang to do that?” Jingyi asked, and the Jiang disciple nodded once more.

“He could, but he's an aggressive fighter, so his moves ended up being powerful and sharp,” said the Jiang disciple, and Jingyi turned to face Jin Ling.

“That's how you fight as well, Young princess.”

Jin Ling's brow twitched and responds, “Is that supposed to be a compliment or an insult?”

“Why would I compliment you? I’m stating a fact.”

In disbelief, Wei Wuxian frowns at him. “Lan Zhan, leave some leeway and you’ll maintain good ties. You let me off this time, if you’re in trouble next time, I’ll definitely help you!”

“I doubt young Hanguang-jun would seek your assistance,” Jin Zixuan mumbled. “No, I doubt he'll get himself into trouble at all,” he adds.

“Isn’t this the time—” Lan Xichen absolutely recalls this and turns to face his younger brother. Lan Xichen remembered seeing him being dirty and soaked because of the rain, and

Lan Xichen wouldn't lie, he really was shocked at how disheveled he was and how hard his expression was that evening.

"Yes," Lan Wangji responded quickly.

"Sorry, Lan Zhan," Wei Wuxian apologized sheepishly. How stupid was his younger self to drag Lan Wangji into trouble? Ugh.

"No sorry's between us," Lan Wangji whispered back into his husband's ear.

Lan Wangji responded with a scoff.

"You—" Wei Wuxian was becoming irritated, but his annoyance transformed into a smirk, definitely scheming something. "Alright then," Wei Wuxian threw the only jar of Emperor's Smile left in his grasp and dashed forward. Now their roles had switched; it was now Wei Wuxian chasing and attacking Lan Wangji.

Then, the umbrella was knocked from Lan Wangji's grasp as he was caught off guard. He glares at Wei Wuxian and attempts to grab him, only to have the other duck and hug his waist.

"Wait, what—"

"Don't push him!"

Nie Huaisang sighs, "Too late."

Wei Wuxian pushed them both off the roof, causing them to fall on the ground outside Cloud Recesses.

The majority of the cultivators did not know what to say. Lan Qiren, on the other hand, almost qi deviated, coughing and nose bleeding. Lan Xichen holds him, asking him if he is alright.

“He pushed him out of the roof,” Madam Lan gaped, while Qingheng-jun simply shook his head. His son’s husband is really interesting, but that did not mean he approved of him pushing his son off the roof, but since he did not want Wei Wuxian to feel bad, he just remained silent.

“Why did you pushed him?!” Jin Zixuan exclaimed. If he were Wei Wuxian, obnoxious and shameless, he'd rather die than drag the second jade into trouble.

“Perhaps so they'll both be punished in the morning.”

“Poor Hanguang-jun, forced to break the rules.”

“Righteous Hanguang-jun, always gets into trouble when he’s with Wei Wuxian.”

“Why can't Wei Wuxian simply follow the rules of Lan Sect?”

Cultivators muttered, causing Wei Wuxian to shrink between Lan Wangji's arms. It's not like he wanted his husband to get in trouble with him; that would be the absolute last thing he'd do.

Sizhui and Lan Wangji's expression darkened, and together with Lan Xichen and Jingyi, they silenced all of them at once.

“All of you are yapping too much; why don't you all stay in Cloud Recesses and see if you can abide by every rule,” Cangse Sanren said, earning a glare from Lan Qiren, while Qingheng-jun agreed silently. He can claim that he and Wei Wuxian are similar in terms of breaking the rules, but did it for different reasons. Wei Wuxian breaks rules for fun and because he is untamed, while he broke the rules out of love.

Rain continued to pour, and Wei Wuxian moved slowly, ignoring the fact that he was now completely soaked and filthy. He wincingly kneels on the muddy ground and rubs his head. Lan Wangji, who was also filthy and soaked, sat up in front of him.

Jiang Yanli tries not to wince. The fall had obviously been painful even if the building is not that high, and both boys were now drenched.

“Hey Lan Zhan, now you’re outside as well,” Wei Wuxian says with a sly smirk. “You broke the curfew too, we’ll both be punished now.”

“Clearly that’s not Hanguang-jun’s fault,” Nie Mingjue interjects, earning a few nods from the cultivators.

“If no one saw this, no one would believe Hanguang-jun was punished because he got pushed off the roof,” an unknown man said, shaking his head.

In an instant, Lan Wangji stands up, glaring down at Wei Wuxian as he forced himself to calm down. Lan Wangji was clearly struggling to contain his rage. He'd been doing nothing but keeping his emotions in check, but this man—this Wei Wuxian—could easily make him lose all the composure he'd worked so hard to maintain.

Then, Lan Wangji scoffed and turns away, demonstrating great restraint as he walked back inside Cloud Recesses.

Wei Wuxian rose to his feet and smiled. “But rest assured, I won’t tell anyone about it. No one else knows besides you and me,” he assures and grins.

Lan Xichen promptly covers his giggles with a cough, so obvious that Qingheng-jun smiled.

Jiang Wanyin huffs, “How sure are you that Lan Wangji won’t tell a soul?”

Knowing what happened next, Wei Wuxian crossed his arms and stuck his tongue out at his brother.

“I should’ve done that to you too, Qiren.” Cangse Sanren says, turning to face the paling man, who is still reeling from what he has just witnessed.

“If you did, I would’ve forced the elders to kick you out,” he hissed, and Cangse Sanren shrugs, as if the idea of being kicked out is more ideal than being stuck in such a stuffy place.

The scene then fades and shifts within the Cloud Recesses. The sound of a man's footsteps echoed across the screen. The screen gradually rises and focuses on Nie Huaisang, who sneakily walks to his friends’ room, looking left to right to ensure no one sees him.

Nie Huaisang and Jiang Wanyin froze, recalling what they’d done in this specific scene. Mingjue's eyes narrow, or rather, he glares at his younger brother again, who moves away from him again, hiding his face behind his fan.

“First Wei Wuxian, now you?” He scowled.

Nie Huaisang steals a glance at him and stammers, “I mean, I wouldn’t miss the chance to—”

“You’re breaking rules, Huaisang! You could’ve studied!” Nie Mingjue interrupts. To others, Nie Mingjue appeared to be harsh on his brother, scolding and shouting him constantly, but only Nie Huaisang knew that underneath that strict and violent temper, his brother is only protective and loves his younger brother very much.

“But studying is exhausting!”

While the two argued, Yu Ziyuan noticed his son frozen for a while.

“A-Cheng, what’s the problem?” she asked, her tone harsh despite feeling uneasy.

“Nothing’s wrong—I’m just—nevermind.”

Jin Ling definitely did not miss the way his uncle was stumbling through his words. “Is this the scene the three of you got caught drinking, Jiujiu?!”

“A-Ling!”

Nie Huaisang knocks on the door using his fan. He waits for the door to open.

“What took you so long?” Wei Wuxian whispered.

“I grabbed some peanuts,” Nie Huaisang responded, holding out a small pouch. Then, Wei Wuxian peers out the door, looking left and right, as does Nie Huaisang. Upon confirming that no one is nearby, Wei Wuxian pulls Nie Huaisang inside and closes the door.

“What kind of trouble did these two cause this time?” Jingyi wondered.

Zizhen shrugs and says, “Probably something to do with breaking the rules.”

Inside the room, Nie Huaisang, Jiang Wanyin, and Wei Wuxian all drank a cup of Emperor's Smile simultaneously.

Lan Qiren’s brows twitched. Now it’s three of them breaking the rules. Why do he have the most disobedient students?

“So that’s why you—” Yu Ziyuan did not finish her sentence and just massaged her temples. Now she is going to witness his son breaking the rules as well. She should hold Wei Wuxian accountable for his influence on his son. Beside her, Jiang Fengmian is looking as if he expected this to happen and huffed in amusement.

“Oh, A-Cheng,” Jiang Yanli coos.

“Wei-xiong,” sighs Nie Huaisang contentedly. “This liquor is really good.”

“Of course,” Wei Wuxian responds, pouring another cup of wine, “here in Gusu, we shall drink the Emperor’s Smile.” He raises the cup, staring at it as if it’s something worth his attention. “Fragmant and mellow, refreshing but not aggressive, smooth and powerful,” he says and sips his wine.

“Is it really that good?” asked an unknown cultivator, to which Wei Wuxian nodded.

“That’s the first thing you should try when you’re in Gusu; it’s so good!”

“Nevermind that, they’re all drinking wine inside Cloud Recesses!” The unknown cultivator’s friend exclaimed.

“"Why are you yelling at me? I did nothing!”

“I can’t believe we’re seeing them breaking the rules at the same time.” Sizhui says, trying not to be too loud.

“I know right?” Zizhen concurs. “I mean, I can imagine Senior Wei doing that since he does it all the time, but it’s so weird seeing Sect Leader Jiang and Sect Leader Nie breaking the rules.”

“Just drink the liquor,” grumbled Jiang Wanyin, “you make it sound like you're describing a person.”

“Jiang-xiong, I disagree,” Nie Huaisang protested. “I think Wei-xiong makes an excellent point. A wise man once said, fine beauty is just like a great wine.”

“If that's true, you'll find your partners by following the scent of liquor,” Jiang Wanyin remarked as he sipped his wine.

“Try doing that, Jiang Cheng,” Wei Wuxian wiggles his eyebrows. “Perhaps you and We—”

“God, please shut your goddamn mouth, Wei Wuxian!” yells Jiang Wanyin, his cheeks gradually turning pink.

“A-Cheng, is there someone—”

“No!” He cuts off the person who asked, until he realized it was his sister and apologized immediately. “No one, A-Jie,” he mumbled.

Shaking her head, she spoke, “You cannot fool me A-Cheng, who is it?”

“Yeah, who is it?” Jin Zixuan and Jin Ling simultaneously inquired, intrigued and surprised that Jiang Wanyin had liked someone in the past.

Jin Ling tries to picture his uncle with a wife and immediately cringed. Immediately, no. He can't imagine his uncle being as lovey-dovey as Wei Wuxian and Lan Wangji.

Hearing all of this, Yu Ziyuan, who seemed intrigued, interjected, saying, “Tell us later, A-Cheng. I'd like to know her name so we can start looking when we're done here.”

“She must be very pretty and nice to capture A-Cheng’s heart.” Jiang Fengmian remarked, smiling at the fact that his son is in love.

Jiang Wanyin's mind just stopped working as he paled. He wants to bury himself alive. Like right now.

‘Oh, you won't have to look at all; she's right here,’ Wei Wuxian thought, smiling and casting a glance at Wen Qing, who is conversing with Wen Ning.

Wei Wuxian huffs, “I will be fine, as long as I have wine.”

“You sure about that?” Nie Huaisang smirks, fluttering his fan.

“I’m definitely fine as long as I have wine, my husband, and my parents!”

“Aww, we’re placed last?” Cangse Sanren dramatically wipes the tears in the corner of her eyes, causing Wei Changze to smile.

“No! Those three are placed first!” Wei Wuxian quickly clarifies, before smiling.

“Your mother is just kidding,” Wei Changze chuckles, “don't listen to her.”

“I am not!”

Wei Wuxian simply laughed.

Jiang Wanyin chokes on the wine he has just drank. “I'm not sure how the Lans of Gusu put up with you.”

“Hey, I am adorable!”

“No.”

“Very much.”

The responses of Jiang Wanyin and Lan Wangji overlapped. Wei Wuxian hides his blushing face with his hands while Madam Lan and Lan Xichen giggled at Lan Wangji’s earnest answer. Jiang Yanli, on the other hand, was amused by his brother's groaning and face-palming reaction.

“We also think Senior Wei is adorable!” exclaimed Zizhen earnestly.

“Only you thought of that, Zizhen,” Jingyi deadpanned.

“Noooo! I am adorable!” Wei Wuxian protested, face still flushed.

Jin Zixuan huffs in amusement. “Lan Wangji said yes and is embarrassed; when the disciples said otherwise, he protested.”

“A-Xian likes it when people call him cute; he's just shy sometimes,” Jiang Yanli explains, turning to Lan Wangji's form. “Especially if it comes from someone dear to him.”

“It is you. No one can compete with your standards.”

After hearing that, Nie Huaisang leans closer to Wei Wuxian. “Wei-xiong, what standards?”

“Skip this out!” Jiang Wanyin yells, his face turning redder by the second.

“No, we want to know!”

“Yes!”

“Too late, Sect Leader Jiang,” Lan Xichen laments.

Many female cultivators squealed. The majority of the female cultivators in the temple did not volunteer to go on a blind date with Sect Leader Jiang because of his aggressive temper, intimidating anyone who wants to pursue him, but no one can deny that he is one of the top ten most desirable men in the cultivation world, who is very, undeniably good-looking.

“O-Oh my god, I can’t—” Jin Ling stammers, his body trembling as he tried to hold back his laughter. “I can’t believe I am seeing Jiujiu like this.”

Wei Wuxian smirked.

“Wei Wuxian, I dare you!” Jiang Wanyin threatens, pointing at him.

“Beauty!” Wei Wuxian yells. “Natural Beauty!”

“Hey!” Jiang Wanyin exclaimed, threateningly pointing at him. “Wei Wuxian—”

Wei Wuxian hastily stands up to get away from his brother. “Virtuous and caring!” he revealed.

“Wei Wuxian!”

“Ay, ay!” Wei Wuxian runs away once more, keeping a safe distance from their table. “Born into a good family!”

Nie Huaisang prevents Jiang Wanyin from getting too close to Wei Wuxian, desperate to know more about his friend’s standards.

“This is what you do in the evening? Running around and getting in trouble?” Nie Mingjue glared and Nie Huaisang nervously laughs, choosing not to respond to his older brother.

“Stop it!” Jiang Wanyin exclaimed.

“She should not be too chatty—”

“Wei Wuxian—”

“Look at how red Sect Leader Jiang's face is,” Jingyi said to Sizhui, unconsciously shuddering as he imagined a raged Sect Leader about to strike the screen.

Zizhen shrugs, “Honestly, I wouldn’t be embarrassed by this at all.”

“That's because you two are totally different, Zizhen,” Sizhui says matter-of-factly.

“And should have a gentle voice!”

“Stop running, Wei Wuxian!”

“Oh my god, these three..” Madam Jin chuckled.

“They're so loud, how did the other Lans not hear them?” Song Lan inquired, raising an eyebrow.

“Perhaps they put a silencing talisman inside the room?” Xiao Xingchen suggests and chuckles afterwards.

“Be careful!” Nie Huaisang cautioned her as she pursued the Jiang heir.

“But not too capable!” Wei Wuxian revealed more, still running away from his brother. “And there’s more, she should not burn through money!”

The female cultivators began whispering and squealing once more. Now that they have an idea of what Sect Leader Jiang is looking for in a woman, they will try hard to meet those qualifications. On the side, Nie Huaisang and Wei Wuxian laughed, while Jiang Wanyin lowered his head in shame. It's even more humiliating that the girls are now staring at him as if he were the prey to be devoured soon. Perhaps he should bury himself alive now and relinquish control of the sect to his father.

Jiang Fengmian is overcome with delight. Chuckling, he says, “Son, your face is too red.”

Jiang Wanyin ignored his father.

“A-Cheng’s standards is good,” Yu Ziyuan says while nodding. His son’s standards are typically what other men look for in a woman, but these cultivators think it's excessive.

“Yes, all men have the same standards as Sect Leader Jiang,” an unknown cultivator confirmed.

“Not all of them, look at Hanguang-jun. You'd think he has the same standard as Sect Leader Jiang, but it's quite the opposite,” A female cultivator responded, casting a glance at the

Yiling Patriarch, who was still laughing his ass off.

“Ah, I suppose so.”

“You talk too much!”

“Hey, hey, hey, it’s okay!” Nie Huaisang reassures, blocking Wei Wuxian from his brother.

“Wei Wuxian—”

Then, the doors burst open, and a Lan disciple entered, his expression stunned at what he just witnessed.

“Oh no,” A-Qing mumbled.

“Ha! Got caught again, but not by Hanguang-jun!” Jingyi exclaimed in delight.

Jin Ling’s brows twitched. “Why are you so happy about this?” he interjected as the other shrugged.

Nie Huaisang stares at the screen intently, reminiscing over this specific scene in his mind. Then, he gradually lowered his head in sadness. Nie Mingjue arched an eyebrow, wondering what had upset his younger brother yet again.

Jiang Wanyin was strangling Wei Wuxian on the bed, while Nie Huaisang tries to pull the Jiang heir away from his friend. Upon realizing that a Lan disciple walked in and and saw the three boys in such an awkward position, they immediately corrected their positions, now sitting properly. Nie Huaisang opens his fan and begins to fan himself.

Many cultivators burst out laughing.

Yu Ziyuan tried contain her rage and embarrassment while Jiang Fengmian was torn between amusement and disapproval. Nie Mingjue was even worse. He resumed lecturing his younger brother.

The three friends simply lowered their heads, but they knew in their hearts that, despite their embarrassment, they were not sorry because on the screen was one of the three's most treasured memories.

“What would it be like if I were there,” Jin Zixuan wondered, and Jiang Wanyin heard him.

“You’d get punished every time,” he deadpanned. “I also cannot imagine if you were friends with us.”

“Understandable,” Jin Zixuan flatly replies.

Wei Wuxian was about to open his mouth when the disciple turned away and walked out to their room without saying anything.

“Oh no,” Nie Huaisang thought in dread.

“Kneel!” A disciple exclaimed, slamming Wei Wuxian to the floor.

“You get what you deserve for breaking the rules,” Yu Ziyuan mumbled as Cangse Sanren secretly glared at her.

“Oh,” Sizhui was struck with the realization that they were going to see his Xian-gege getting punished. Concerned, he whispered, “Please be gentle with him.” His hands were fumbling on his robes in nervousness.

“They could’ve just held him down gently, why are they being aggressive on him?” Jin Ling grumbled quietly, his eyes rolling at the process.

Wei Wuxian grimaced as he was restrained by the Lan disciples. Wei Wuxian turned his head and smirked at Lan Wangji, who was standing beside him. “Lan Zhan! You're going to punish me now?” he scoffs, adding, “I won’t yield!”

Not far away from them was Jiang Wanyin and Nie Huaisang hiding behind the pillars and keeping an eye on Wei Wuxian.

“Why aren’t they punished? They broke the rules too!” exclaimed an elderly man, eliciting murmurs of agreement from the cultivators.

“I forced them to join me, so obviously they’re not at fault for breaking the rules. I am the eldest of the three, so I should—”

“Cut the crap,” Jiang Wanyin interrupted, glaring at his brother. He despises his brother for being so selfless that even now, Wei Wuxian has chosen to take all the blame to himself. “We knew the rules—we broke them willingly.” He clarified.

“Yes,” Nie Huaisang said, nodding. “Don't take all the blame, Wei-xiong. We did, however, wonder why we were not included. In fact, we expected to be dragged to the hall the next morning to receive our punishments.” He cast a glance at Lan Wangji.

“Well, that’s because I made a deal with Lan Zhan.”

Jiang Wanyin groaned, “Of course you did.”

“Wei-xiong has a lot of guts; he can smile even in this situation,” Nie Huaisang said, looking at his friend, who was kneeling on the cold floor.

Jiang Wanyin, while crossing his arms, scoffed and said, “Even if the sky collapsed, he would still be smiling.”

Nobody said anything about it, but they did agree with Jiang Wanyin's words. So far, Wei Wuxian has always smiled whenever he's in trouble that it appears whatever trouble comes his way, he'll overcome it with ease.

“He’s not going to smile soon,” Madam Jin says, shaking her head in shame, fully aware of what's going to happen in the future. It's a shame because she's grown fond of this boy's beautiful smile. And it's a shame that Wei Wuxian's parents will soon witness how the cultivation world despised their son, including herself.

“The 530th rule of Gusu Lan Clan: Be strictly just and impartial,” Wei Wuxian recited with a mocking smile. “I wasn’t the only one who broke the curfew last night. If you practice—” Wei Wuxian did not finish his sentence when Lan Wangji lifted the bottom of robes, and knelt down beside Wei Wuxian.

Simultaneously, Lan Qiren and Lan Xichen both closed their eyes and inhaled deeply. Collective gasps of surprised filled the temple, though this is to be expected from righteous Lan Wangji, but it is still shocking to see him submit to punishment.

The disciples were shocked. It's strange and concerning to see Hanguang-jun kneeling. Their Hanguang-jun should be standing tall and immoveable, not kneeling with their Senior Wei. They turned to Lan Wangji, who appeared unbothered of what he’s seeing.

Madam Lan and Qingheng-jun exchanged stunned glances at each other, then turned to their son. He could’ve kept his rule-breaking secret, but their son happens to be a rule-abiding and righteous person that he chose to punish himself rather than get away with it.

“Look at what you did! Lan Wangji was forced to kneel for punishment because of you! Why can’t you just—”

“With all due respect, Yu-furen, my son did not intend for this to happen,” Wei Changze cuts her off, shocking them all. The way his face held nothing but slight anger, and the fact that he and Wei Wuxian had the same face in the past mortified them. It's like staring at the Yiling Patriarch fresh out of the Burial Mounds all over again.

‘Petrifying..’

“Wei Changze..” Yu Ziyuan hissed.

“San-niang, please stop,” Jiang Fengmian whispered to her. Yu Ziyuan turned to face his husband, whose face displayed silent plea. She wanted nothing more than to scold Wei Wuxian or argue with their old acquaintance, but she also didn't want to embarrass herself any further. She scoffed and averted her gaze. The Jiang siblings finally exhaled a sigh of relief.

Jingyi leaned in to Sizhui. “You know, I’m starting to hate her,” he said quietly, and Sizhui slapped his mouth shut.

“Don't speak! What if she hears you?!” scolded Sizhui, sweat unexpectedly trickling down his face as nervousness pervaded his entire body. He did not want to deal with the Violet Spider’s anger because of Jingyi, He's already irritated with her for targeting his Xian-gege so much. Who knows when his restraint will snap?

“She can't! I'm practically whispering to you. Also, I just can’t stand her!”

“Neither do I,” Zizhen concurs, scooting further to Sizhui and Jingyi’s side.

Unbeknownst to them, Nie Huaisang heard them clearly, yet the man did not do anything. Why would he when he also feels the same?

Seeing the second jade kneel beside him, Wei Wuxian turned pale with fear as he rushed to say, “Wait, wait, hold it!” He thrashed, trying to break free from the disciples'

grip. “I concede, I concede!”

Lan Wangji ignores his protests, maintaining his focus forward. “Strike!” he commanded, his teeth clenched.

“Ah, Ah! I’m wrong! Lan—Ah!”

Wei Wuxian hugs his husband tightly and apologizes, but the man only shakes his head and embraces him back.

Most of the Lan disciples were already accustomed to this kind of punishments, yet a lot of cultivators closed their eyes and winced at the sight. They may be involved in a number of wars and hunts, but seeing young kids, particularly the Yiling Patriarch and Hanguang-jun, harshly being struck several times and wailing in pain was a very unpleasant sight.

For those who despised Wei Wuxian so much, this, on the screen, was a delightful treat, as if they’re seeing a delicacy that satiates their hunger just simply by looking at it. It was sickening, if Mianmian and Wen Ning had to say so. Wei Wuxian had been nothing but kind and mischievous. The way he became someone they despised in the past was none of any of their business. They knew nothing of how he ended up being that way.

But there were those who silently pitied the young couple. This gave Wen Qing a sense of relief.

“This is why I hate Lan Sect,” Cangse Sanren seethes, clutching his husband’s robes as she tries to calm herself. She did not imply that she hated the sect, but she despised its rules and punishments. It was already difficult for her to see her son living on the streets and barely surviving. She remembered being punished in the past by Lan Sect as well, yet because she’s a woman, she only had mild punishments. She turned to Lan Qiren and glared at him.

Lan Qiren sees her and averts his gaze. Cangse Sanren glared at him frequently, but it was tinged with amusement or mischief. This time, she was for real glaring at him. He wasn't even present when the punishment was administered! What was she blaming him for?

Wei Wuxian wailed and howled in pain as the beatings continued, while Lan Wangji's back was upright, his kneeling position remained proper, yet pained grunts escaped his lips. From the pillars, Nie Huaisang and Jiang Wanyin's expression turned distressed, worry engulfing their system.

For both of them to be punished in this manner for breaking a minor rule; it was unbelievably severe. Jiang Yanli and Wen Qing silently prayed for an end to the beatings. They couldn't bear seeing Wei Wuxian in pain. Lan Xichen, Madam Lan, and Qingheng-jun share their sentiments. While Lan Wangji was obedient to his clan's rules, it was his first time ever breaking a rule that he did not even break. The three of them could sense the anger and disappointment from young Lan Wangji. Lan Qiren, on the other hand, was pleased that his nephew was righteous enough to submit to punishment.

Wei Changze grits his teeth. "When is this gonna stop?" He inquired quietly. The number of strikes was most likely greater than 20. His son only transgressed a minor rule. Why is the punishment still going?

"Softer!" Wei Wuxian cries. "Hit softer!"

Beside him, Lan Wangji was sweating profusely as he endured the pain and strikes, his hands clenched in his robes. It was undoubtedly the first time his composure broke.

"Wei Ying, don't ever blame yourself," Lan Wangji said into his husband's ears.

"I'm sorry."

"No sorry's between us," he responded, kissing his husband on the forehead, and Wei Wuxian finally relaxed.

Lan Xichen could only shake his head as he watched the lovers.

“I never want to see Hanguang-jun punished like that again,” a female cultivator said, and her friends nodded vigorously.

Wei Wuxian sighs inwardly. Oh, how he wished as well, but because of him, his husband—

The scene shifts as the three friends walk to the wooden path. Groans of pain reverberated on the screen. Jiang Wanyin was now carrying Wei Wuxian, while Nie Huaisang snaps his fan open to fan his friend’s sore back.

“Jiang Cheng, slow down,” Wei Wuxian grumbled. “I’m almost shaken off.”

“Woah,” the Jiang disciples gaped in disbelief. “Sect Leader Jiang is carrying Wei Wuxian?”

“I can’t believe I’m seeing this.”

Jiang Yanli smiled at the wholesome scene, remembering how often his brother carried A-Xian when he was injured or felt too tired to walk.

“Is simply carrying you not up to your standards?!” Jiang Wanyin complained.

“I should’ve let Lan Zhan carry me then,” Wei Wuxian smirked.

Jin Zixuan rolled his eyes. “You’re going to let an injured man carry you? Are you that harsh?”

“Not exactly, but—”

“I will carry him, if he wants,” Lan Wangj interrupts Wei Wuxian. His response caused Wei Wuxian to chuckle and blush.

Jin Zixuan sighs. “Of course, why did I bother asking.”

Scoffing, Wei Wuxian responded, “It’s not like I asked you to carry me.”

“If I don’t carry you, you’d be rolling in their ancestral hall for a day. I don’t have that thick of a face to lose!” Jiang Wanyin raged. “Lan Wangji even had fifty more strikes than you, and he even walked by himself. Yet you have the nerve to pretend that you’re crippled? I no longer want to carry you. Get off right now!”

“Wait, seriously?!” Jingyi gaped, and other disciples mirrored his reaction. But then again, Hanguang-jun has always been amazing, even enduring and withstanding such punishment and managing to walk on his own two feet.

“I can’t even pass 15 strikes,” Zizhen says, shuddering at the thought of himself in Hanguang-jun’s place.

“Me either,” Jingyi replied. He turns to Sizhui, and he can immediately imagine his friend passing thirty strikes. Maybe even more than that.

When he notices Jingyi's stare and understanding the question his lips failed to convey, he shakes his head. “I can’t pass either,” he denies, knowing all full well that he could.

“Lying is forbidden, Sizhui,” Jin Ling pipes in.

Jiang Wanyin halts, straightening his posture in attempt to get his brother off his back, but Wei Wuxian clung to him even tighter. “No, I’m wounded,” he insisted.

“You—” The brothers’ argument was abandoned as their attention was drawn to a cherry blossom tree not far away. Under it were two person seated.

“Old Master Lan has returned,” Nie Huaisang noticed.

At the table, Lan Xichen poured tea in Lan Qiren’s cup, his face serene, demonstrating flawlessness and grace of a future Sect Leader.

“Ah, Zewu-jun is so good-looking,” a Nie disciple commented, eyes twinkling with admiration.

“Well, he is the first in the list of top cultivator gentlemen of their generation, so it’s not surprising,” Zizhen said with a wide smile. Gossip can be extremely beneficial at times.

Qingheng-jun huffs. “Is that true, Xichen?” he asked, a smile forming on his lips.

“I do not even know why I am placed first,” Lan Xichen chuckled, turning to face his brother. “I believe Wangji fits the first rank.”

“I don’t,” Lan Wangji protested immediately.

Wei Wuxian laughs and shakes his head. “Well, for me, Lan-er-gege is ranked first. No offense Zewu-jun!”

Madam Lan chuckles in amusement at her son-in-law’s cheerful response.

Lan Xichen grinned. “Offense taken.”

“Uncle, you’ve had an exhausting journey,” Lan Xichen observed, raising his cup of tea. “It must have been tough.”

“The current journeys are not tough yet,” Lan Qiren replied, frowning as he raised his cup as well. “But I'm afraid things will get much more difficult from here on out.”

“Because of Wen Clan?”

At the mention of Wen Clan, everyone suddenly tensed. Right, everyone had almost forgotten that the Wen Clan had played an important role in the war in the past, particularly with Wei Wuxian becoming the Grandmaster of Demonic Cultivation.

“The Wen Clan was really horrible,” Xiao Xingchen said quietly to Song Lan. Even if they were not involved in the Sunshot Campaign, they were well aware of the Wen Sect's cruelty and crimes.

“They’re worse than that, Xingchen,” Song Lan said, his fists clenched.

“Who are Wen Clan, Daozhang?” A-Qing asks, her eyes blinking in anticipation of an answer.

“They’re…” Xingchen trailed off. “They’re bad people,” he concludes, and A-Qing understands immediately.

“Bad like that scumbag Xue Yang?” she asked again, her face contemptuous.

“They’re worse than him, but he’s still bad,” Song Lan explained, and A-Qing finally nodded without asking for more.

Lan Qiren hummed in agreement. “None of the cultivators spoke up during the Discussion Conference. During this round trip, I’ve heard about Wen Clan’s distortion of truths and misdeeds. Such cases are no fewer than a hundred. I already know of this Waterborne Abyss.”

Overcome with rage, he slammed his cup of tea on the table. “They’ve really gone too far!”

Wen Ning, Wen Qing, and Sizhui lowered their heads. The air surrounding the temple is so heavy, no one can relieve it.

“Wen Rouhan is really crazy.” A man snapped, glaring at the Wen siblings for no apparent reason.

“Just because his clan is powerful they can do whatever they like.” A slightly younger man venomously pipes in, hands clutching tightly at the scabbard of his sword.

“Wen Clan has numerous followers,” Lan Xichen informed his Uncle calmly. “For the time being, we must abide. The Waterborne Abyss is notoriously difficult to eradicate.” Lan Xichen stands up to bow. “I’m afraid it will bother Uncle for a few more days.”

“Human life is top priority,” Lan Qiren declared. “So without further ado, I’ll inspect it with you today.”

The scene shifts to Wei Wuxian, Jiang Wanyin, and Nie Huaisang creeping closer, hiding in the bushes in an attempt to eavesdrop. They raised their heads to peak at the two Lans.

“Eavesdropping is forbidden..” Lan Qiren trails off and gives up, knowing that his reprimand will be only be ignored by the three.

“Oh, I almost forgot.” Lan Qiren says as he rises from his seat. “I captured several feral corpses. The disciples could practice on them. First, let Wangji inqure the spirits to learn of their lingering obsessions before death.”

Lan Xichen cups his hands and bows once more. “Although Wangji is still young, he is already an expert in spirit inquiry. I will inform him of this.”

Lan Wangji was delighted to hear his older brother's words, but he couldn't stop the heat in his ears from rising.

“Yes! Hanguang-jun is incredible!”

“Hanguang-jun is the best!”

The disciples cheered, causing some to laugh. No matter how subtle it is, Wei Wuxian bursts out laughing when he notices his husband panicking internally.

“Ah, Hanguang-jun, your ducklings are adorable.”

Jiang Yanli laughed heartily at the couple, while Jiang Wanyin rolled his eyes.

Lan Qiren began to pace while touching his goatee. “Just now, I heard disciples chattering about Wangji being dragged into trouble by Wei Wuxian, punishing himself as a result,” he says, returning his gaze to his nephew. “I have never taught a student as roguish and contemptible as Wei Wuxian.”

Wei Wuxian sheepishly laughed.

Having heard what Lan Qiren said, he gasped and ducked his head, while his two friends shot him a look, pitying him. “This—I’m damned. My ears are gonna hurt again.”

Some cultivators burst out laughing.

Lan Xichen chuckles. “It’s true that Wangji punished himself, but he wasn’t dragged into it. Wei Wuxian is boy at heart. His love of mischief is only natural.”

“See? Even Zewu-jun understands!” Wei Wuxian exclaimed with a smile on his lips.

“Sometimes, it’s too much,” Jiang Wanyin grumbled, but it was tinged with fondness, that caused Wei Wuxian to feel warm inside.

“A-Cheng, it’s never too much,” Jiang Yanli protested, lips quirking up.

Hearing noises nearby, Lan Xichen turns and sees the three already standing by the bushes; Wei Wuxian was laughing. He yelps when Nie Huaisang and Jiang Wanyin pulled him down to hide once more.

Lan Xichen smiled, amused by the three while Lan Qiren simply scoffed and turns to walk away, flicking his sleeve in the process.

Cangse Sanren and Wei Changze stared at the screen, chuckling at the three friends' attempt to hide even though they had already been discovered.

“What does that mean?” Wei Wuxian inquired, peering out from the bushes once more.

“He doesn’t care enough to lecture you,” Jiang Wanyin says as he emerges from the bushes. There was no need to hide from the Lans at this point. “Perhaps he’s given up on you.”

Lan Qiren froze. Yes, he stopped lecturing Wei Wuxian because it was pointless. The boy, like his mother, would simply ignore it and cause mischief around him. If he hadn't given up on him, if he had attempted to comprehend his theory about resentful energy, if he had tried to understand him and tried hard enough, would he be able to stop Wei Wuxian from becoming someone he isn't? The answer is uncertain, yet there is a lasting remorse in his bones.

Wei Wuxian scoffed at his brother.

“No more hiding. Come out please,” Lan Xichen urged, causing the brothers to turn their heads in surprise.

And the next second, the three are already standing in front of Lan Xichen.

Nie Huaisang cracks an uneasy grin. “Xichen-gege,” he greeted, scratching his head with his fan, as Wei Wuxian stood behind him, his arm around Jiang Wanyin to help him stand upright.

“They look silly,” Madam Jin observed before turning to face her son. “You could have become friends with them if you hadn't been so pompous.”

Jin Zixuan wasn't sure whether to be pleased or unhappy. “Do you want me to get into trouble with them?”

“That’s not what I meant, idiot.”

“Then what do you—”

“Figure it out yourself.”

“Wangji punished excessively,” Lan Xichen informed the three. “It will probably take 3 to 5 days for to recover.”

Jiang Wanyin, stunned, exclaimed, “What? 3 to 5 days?! Lan Wangji is too harsh! How could—”

Wei Wuxian gave his brother a warning look, effectively shutting him up and glanced away from Lan Xichen.

Lan Xichen merely grinned and chuckled. “But it wouldn't be an issue,” he reassures. “Wei-gongzi, I’ll teach you a method, and you’ll be fine in a few hours.”

“Wait, there's another method to relieve pain?” Mianmian inquired, casting a questioning gaze at Lan Xichen, but the man refused to answer and only smiled.

“Oh god, it’s *that* next scene.” Wei Wuxian smirked, prompting Jiang Wanyin to quiver, goosebumps crawling all over his body.

“What scene, Wei Wuxian?!”

“Everyone, prepare to turn around!” Wei Wuxian exclaimed.

“W-Wait, what do you mean?!” The cultivators screamed, their cheeks dusting pink.

Some men were so disgusted that they gagged.

“Y'all are nasty! Nothing happened! Just two guys bathing in the cold pond~” Wei Wuxian pauses, his grin expanding, tempted to cause more mischief. “Alone~” he sang, evoking even more cries from everyone.

And they all refer to him as dramatic when they are all being dramatic.

The sky darkens and the background changes, bringing them to a secluded area of Gusu, The scene moves forward and the cold spring came into existence, surrounded by towering hills and trees, and a couple of lights illuminating the area, making the entire

place appear magical. Then, there was a man in the pond, his back facing the cultivators, and his clothes neatly folded on the ground.

It was Lan Wangji.

“Hanguang-jun’s naked!”

“Oh my god, turn around!”

All disciples and young women began to panic as their cheeks dusted red. They hastily turned their backs to the screen. Never have they seen Hanguang-jun naked as he had always been a conservative person. Not a single stretch of skin on his body had ever been exposed to anyone, and yet here he is, bathing alone, his back visible to all. Some were tempted to turn around just to stare and admire him, but because they respect him too much, they did not do it. They'll just listen to the conversation, if ever there is one.

Some men envied Lan Wangji’s body. A man with beautiful, handsome features, a good physique, and exceptional skills is too much for one man to have. Why aren't they as fortunate as he is?

“Are you certain you did nothing here?” Cangse Sanren inquired, a teasing smile on her lips

“No, mother!” Wei Wuxian exclaimed, flushing. “Though I wish we did.”

“Wei Wuxian!” Lan Qiren yelled, looking as if he was about to pass out again.

“I did not sign up to see this shit,” Jiang Wanyin said, earning a light slap from his sister, who reminded him not to curse, and he immediately apologized.

Wei Wuxian pouts at his brother. “Jiang Cheng, as if we did not get naked when we were young.”

“That’s different. Here, your—”

“We’re not even husbands this time.”

“You know what, I’m done talking,” Jiang Wanyin interrupted, face palming.

Lan Wangji was bathing peacefully, staring at his own reflection, when a loud voice interrupted his tranquillity.

“Lan Zhan!”

Lan Wangji immediately turns around and sees the large splash of water. In a second, Wei Wuxian emerged from the water, hugging and rubbing his arms, trembling from the cold.

“It’s cold here!”

“It’s called a cold spring for a reason, idiot.” Jin Ling deadpanned.

“A-Ling.”

“Sorry, Mother.”

“How did you come in?!” Lan Wangji blurted out.

“Zewu-jun let me in!” he answered, approaching Lan Wangji.

Hearing this, Jingyi gaped and turned to Lan Xichen, exclaiming, “Zewu-jun was scheming!”

Zizhen was in disbelief. “He planned this!”

“Had he already known?!”

Lan Xichen nodded at the disciples. “Fairly early. Wangji was so obvious.”

Lan Wangji blushed through his ears.

The cultivators fixed their gaze on him, then on the screen, where young Lan Wangji is staring at young Wei Wuxian. They feel compelled to blurt out, *‘He does not even look interested in Wei Wuxian. He looked he wants him out of his hair!’* but they chose to remain silent. Lan Xichen can read his brother in ways that others cannot. What else could they say?

Lan Qiren, on the other hand, gave his nephew a betrayed look, causing the man to laugh lightly, not even apologizing for what he had orchestrated.

“Why are you getting closer?” Lan Wangji demanded.

“Seems warmer on your side.”

Mianmian chuckles. “Are you really that desperate to be near him?”

“You have no idea,” smirked Wei Wuxian, winking at his husband.

“No,” he protested, taking a step back.

“Give him a break,” Nie Mingjue sighs, pitying Lan Wangji.

“When Wei-xiong is around, he cannot,” Nie Huaisang said, smiling behind his fan.

“Lan Zhan,” he said as he moved closer. “It's not very nice of you to heal by yourself in the cold spring without telling me.”

“Damn, Hanguang-jun really has a good body,” a female cultivator in her 30s commented.

“I know, right? How old is he in this? Not many can achieve a body like that.”

“He looks like he’s 16.”

“Wei Wuxian’s body is good too, though he looks quite smaller next to Lan Wangji.”

Lan Wangji turned away from him. “I came here for cultivation, not healing,” he responded and the cultivators and Wei Wuxian had a clear view of Lan Wangji’s back, blue purple bruises covering his fair skin caused by the earlier punishment.

Wei Wuxian and the rest cringed.

Feeling guilty, Wei Wuxian scratched the back of his neck, his face flushed with shame.

“Honestly speaking, Lan Zhan, I admire you so much. You’re so stern and stand by your word—I can never do that,” he lightly laughs. “You’re really impressive.”

Madam Lan and Jiang Yanli may have cooed at the two.

“Ugh, why are we seeing this again?”

“Tch, cutsleeves.”

Baoshan Sanren effectively silenced them.

“Hey, Lan-er-gongzi, let’s be friends,” he proposed, tapping Lan Wangji’s shoulder twice. In response, Lan Wangji distanced himself from him.

“I don’t think he wants to be friends with you,” Jiang Yanli said, the words *‘he wants your relationship to be something more,’* was left unsaid, but Wei Wuxian knew anyway.

“If I knew he liked me so much, I would’ve proposed something,” Wei Wuxian said, causing Lan Wangji’s heart to flutter. As nice as it is to hear his husband want to propose something, like courting or whatever his husband is thinking, he fears that his younger self will be overwhelmed, misinterpret it, and then get angry at him for teasing him and his feelings.

“While you’re a genius, you’re stupid when it comes to feelings,” Jiang Wanyin deadpanned.

Offended, Wei Wuxian pouted, “Jiang Cheng, why are you so mean to me?”

“What a spoilsport,” Wei Wuxian grumbled, slightly pouting. “You can enjoy many benefits from being my friend. I can take you to Yunmeng to pluck lotus and hunt pheasants, it’s really fun!”

“No,” he promptly refused, eyes closed and face frowning.

Pouting once more, he began pacing behind Lan Wangji, seemingly pondering on what to suggest so the other will agree to him, but he couldn't think of anything, so he glared

at Lan Wangji.

“Don’t keep saying ‘No’. Girls won’t like it!”

“As if he’s interested with any girls.” Nie Huaisang giggled.

“No,” Jin Zixuan interjected, “he’s not interested in women at all.”

He nudged Lan Wangji. “No women would marry you.”

Jiang Wanyin snorted. “Yeah, he married an idiot instead.”

“Why don’t you look for a wife instead, Sect Leader Jiang?”

A lot of heads turned to Lan Xichen, who was smiling and exuding mischief. They gaped at him, particularly Jiang Wanyin, while Jiang Yanli, Wei Wuxian, and Nie Huaisang burst out laughing. Jin Ling and Jin Zixuan looked like they wanted to join as well but they did not seeing that Yu Ziyuan had a dark look on her face.

Jiang Wanyin, still unable to believe the first jade was teasing him, had recovered from the shock and smirked. “How about you, Zewu-jun? Why don't we find a wife together and see who marries first?”

Still smiling, Lan Xichen shakes his head and said, “Unfortunately, I’m not planning to marry anyone, Sect Leader Jiang.”

“Why not?” Madam Lan interjected.

“I am not compelled to do so, Mother.” Lan Xichen replied softly. Qingheng-jun pondered whether his first son would soon eat his words. Perhaps in the future.

Jiang Wanyin could only grumble and cross his arms.

Lan Xichen turned around to face his sworn brother and asked, “How about you, Mingjue?”

Perplexed, he asked, “Me, what?”

“Find a wife?” The first jade suggested.

‘Why am I included in this conversation?’ was left unsaid by Nie Mingjue and, instead, he responded, “I’m not interested.”

“You are going to be alone by yourself forever,” Wei Wuxian said, and Lan Wangji gave him a brief glance before turning away.

“That’s fine,” Lan Wangji replied softly, drawing Wei Wuxian's disbelief.

“Hey, is every member of your clan that vapid?” he asked. “Your father is as vapid as you, your mother must be bored!”

All the Lans flinched at Wei Wuxian’s words, particularly Madam Lan and Qingheng-jun.

“I'm so sorry; that was stupid of me to say,” Wei Wuxian bows, nervously biting his lower lip. The last thing he wants before the end of the world is for his husband's parents to be upset with him. In an instant, Qingheng-jun pats his shoulder.

“There is no need to apologize, Wei Wuxian.”

And Qingheng-jun means it. Not everyone knows him and his wife, so naturally they will assume what they are until they'll know them personally. He couldn't blame his son's husband for saying that because he considers himself vapid and boring as well. Wei Wuxian straightened his posture and Qingheng-jun and Madam Lan offered him a smile, which greatly relieved Wei Wuxian. He even held his breath for who knows how long.

Turning away from the second jade, Lan Wangji hesitated to answer, but he eventually responded, “I don’t have a mother.”

“That’s not possible,” Wei Wuxian cuts in. “You can’t be born out of thin air—” he didn't finish his sentence as the second jade's words sank into his mind.

Madam Lan lowered her head. Her heart ached and she wanted to reach out for her second son, but instead, he held Xichen's hand, which he gladly accepted and gripped tightly. She could not imagine how painful it would be for her second son to realize his mother is gone. As a child, he probably assumed she went far away and will return, but she died, without saying anything or leaving a letter for her for them. She and her husband didn't even had a chance to bid farewell to each other.

She snapped out of her reverie when someone took her other hand, and when she looked up, she saw her second son, worry displayed on his face, but Madam Lan smiled.

“I am here,” she declared. “I will never leave again.”

And this seems to comfort Lan Xichen and Lan Wangji.

The teasing air between the two of them faded. Wei Wuxian slowly turns to face Lan Wangji, who is still looking forward, his expression devoid of any emotion. He looks away again and takes a deep breath.

“My parents died when I was four,” Wei Wuxian revealed.

Cangse Sanren, Wei Changze, and Jiang Fengmian jolted slightly into their respective seats.

Yu Ziyuan seemed to want to say something, but after noticing the air around them, she decided to remain silent.

Forcing a smile, he said, “You might think I should remember things then,” he shakes his head. “But I don’t. The only thing I remembered is being chased by wild dogs. I don’t even remember my parents’ faces anymore.”

Many cultivators pitied the two couples because, while they expected teasing and flirting, the unexpected opening up to each other was precious, momentous even. Cangse Sanren and Wei Changze’s hearts clenched, suddenly remembering what their son had been through. Wei Wuxian approached his parents and embraced them, and the couple gladly returned the embrace.

The Jiang family were astounded. Because, despite the fact that Wei Wuxian had lived in Lotus Pier for six years, never had they ever heard him speak openly about what had happened to him or his parents. The fact that he told Lan Wangji this early in his first life indicates that Wei Wuxian trusted him with this crucial information. Suddenly, a tinge of envy crept into Jiang Wanyin's bones. He dismissed it right away. It's pointless to be envious right now.

“Senior Wei,” the disciples murmured as they looked at the man, their hearts breaking for him.

Lan Wangji cast him a sidelong glance, as if expecting Wei Wuxian to reveal more.

“But I do recall a memory,” he laughs, “I was riding on a donkey with my Mother aside,” The scene shifts to the middle of the wilderness. “My father was right in front of us. It might be that my mom cracked a joke, and my father laughed.”

Cangse Sanren and Wei Changze vividly remembered this scene. This was five days before they arrived at the inn and left their son to go night hunting. The realization that their son only remembered a small moment before their death hit them so much in the stomach. It was so heart-breaking that they were tempted to cry, but they restrained themselves. They have to be strong for their son.

Then, the scene brings them back to the cold springs. Wei Wuxian inhales a deep breath and shakes his head before returning his gaze to the second jade. “Lan Zhan, let me tell you, girls in Yunmeng are exceptionally pretty,” he winks, deciding to tease the other even more. “You really don’t want to come?”

Many cultivators blinked.

“Wait, that was so fast, we haven’t even recovered from the sadness!”

“Well, I think that’s alright. We don’t need early sadness, okay?”

Jiang Wanyin and Jiang Yanli shouldn’t be this surprised. They had long suspected that their brother would cover up his true feelings with teasing and mischief if ever he said revealed something significant, because, as Wei Wuxian put it, being vulnerable and weak does not fit his mischievous and obnoxious nature. Really, he and Lan Wangji are similar in terms of bottling up their feelings.

Distancing himself once more, Lan Wangji responded a resolute, “No”

Jingyi groaned, “Why do you keep refusing him Hanguang-jun?!”

Because of his loud complaint and whining, the cultivators had realized that all of the disciples and young women still had their backs turned to the screen.

“You can turn around now,” Lan Wangji said, dismissing Jingyi's complaint.

They all reluctantly turned around and flushed when they saw young Wei Wuxian and Lan Wangji still naked.

Sizhui simply felt the need to turn around because he felt he was invading his adoptive parents' privacy. “Hanguang-jun, we shouldn’t—”

“It’s fine.”

“Just remember that my Hanguang-jun is a married man!” Wei Wuxian exclaimed, his voice echoing throughout the temple.

“No one’s stealing him, Wei Wuxian,” Jiang Wanyin deadpanned. *‘I doubt he'd let other women take him. He literally had been waiting for you for years.’* Was left unsaid by him as he didn't want his brother to remember any traumatic memories. Not yet, at any rate.

Because his invitation was turned down and Lan Wangji started walking to the deeper part of the pond, Wei Wuxian pouted.

Lan Wangji turns around again when he hears a splash of water behind him, curious what the other is up to now.

Frowning, he demanded, “What are you doing?”

On land, Wei Wuxian snatched Lan Wangji’s outer robe. “You keep refusing me,” he says, flipping his hair back. “I’m really displeased. Enjoy a long soak in there by yourself, Lan-er-gongzi!” He walked away, throwing the robes over his shoulder.

“He stole Hanguang-jun’s robes!”

“Stealing is forbidden—”

“Uncle, we are not in Cloud Recesses.” Lan Xichen reminded.

“Imagine if you let me wear your outer robes while walking back to the dorms. What do you think the other guest disciples would say, Lan-er-gege?” Wei Wuxian whispered to his husband’s ears, lips quirking up as he sees his husband’s ears turning red. He watched as his husband took a deep breath, seemingly to calm himself. Wei Wuxian wants nothing but to kiss him senseless right now, but he’s not so shameless as to do it in front of so many eyes.

“How dare you!” he growled.

Halting, Wei Wuxian scoffs mockingly. “I’m afraid of nothing,” he declares, turning back and giggling as he looked over Lan Wangji’s form. “Lan Zhan, you have quite a good figure~” he praised.

“Shameless,” Lan Wangji said, but not with anger, but with amusement.

“Oh my god,” Jiang Wanyin groaned. “I can't handle this. I'm going to turn around.” And true to his word, he did.

Wei Wuxian rolled his eyes. “Jiang Cheng, you’re so dramatic.”

“Tell that to yourself,” Jiang Wanyin blurts out. “I’m not seeing you two flirting in front of me.”

Smirking, Wei Wuxian responded, “You need to see a little bit of flirting. How are you going to get a wife if you're like that?”

“That's none of your concern.”

“Well, I doubt *she’d* like flirting anyway,” Wei Wuxian said, eyeing Wen Qing from afar, her attention drawn to the screen. “Both of you are aggressive toward me,” he finishes, shuddering at the thought of Wen Qing's needles. Wen Ning noticed him staring and smiled. He returned the smile as well.

Knowing who his brother was referring to, Jiang Wanyin lowered his head and sneakily glances at the beautiful doctress.

Wei Wuxian burst out laughing, overjoyed that his praise had elicited a response from Lan Wangji.

“You—”

The redness slowly began creeping into Lan Wangji’s ears.

“Aww, A-Zhan’s flustered again,” Madam Lan chuckles.

The sounds of growling from afar made the two freeze.

“Huh? What’s that sound?” Wei Wuxian asked, alarmed. “Sounds like feral corpses.”

“C-Corpses?” Zizhen stammered.

“Is Cloud Recesses being attacked?!” Jingyi exclaimed, tensing.

“Wait, didn’t Grandmaster Lan said he captured feral corpses after the Discussion Conference?” Xiao Xingchen inquired, turning to face Lan Qiren whose face is now aghast.

Lan Qiren slowly nods and responds, “Yes,” remembering how the disciples informed him and Lan Xichen about the corpses' escape. They were shocked to learn of it and immediately summoned Wangji for more information.

“Wangji and Wei Ying don’t have their swords.” Wei Changze realized, his face aghast as well.

“Uncle brought back several feral corpses today.” Lan Wangji responded calmly. “He locked them in the Obscure Room for me to inquire. How did they get out?”

Wei Wuxian's smile had turned into a frown. There was a major issue here. “None of us brought our weapons. This spells trouble.”

“Don’t just stand there, get your weapons!” Nie Mingjue ordered, but quickly realized that his command would be ignored by the two, so he crossed his arms.

“I hope they’re going to be alright,” Wen Ning said quietly, his heart pounding.

“They’re going to be,” Sizhui insists. “They’re Hanguang-jun and Senior Wei.”

“Yeah, they will be fine.” Zizhen says, as if to reassure himself.

Jiang Wanyin grew worried. Until now, the cultivators who despised their brother miraculously had remained silent. In this memory, his brother will use resentful energy once again. It makes no difference whether he was forced to use it or not; the fact that it will be shown today will cause issues. He glanced at his brother and noticed him clenching his jaw and realized that he, too, is worried.

He wishes to tell the immortal to disregard the memory, but this will only raise more suspicions.

Wei Wuxian immediately dashed but was halted when Lan Wangji called out, “Wei Wuxian, stop there!”

“What?” Wei Wuxian hurriedly asked, and and Lan Wangji quickly stepped out of the pond. Beads of water dripped down to his chest.

“Oh wow,” a female cultivator murmured, enamoured by the sight.

The female cultivator’s friend nudged her. “Girl, don’t thirst over Hanguang-jun; Wei Wuxian would kill you.”

“I’m thirsting for both of them,” she said, still staring and gaping. “Both of them might as well kill me.”

“Return my robe,” Lan Wangji ordered.

“You were going to run away with Lan Wangji’s outer robe? Are you not embarrassed?” Jin Zixuan asked, staring strangely at Wei Wuxian, and because Wei Wuxian can't read his expression, he decides not to read it.

“I can't believe you're asking about his robes when there are so many other things to be concerned about,” Wei Wuxian responded and pursed his lips. He cannot calm down because a scene of him unconsciously using resentful energy will be shown. Well, he wasn't entirely concerned, but the fact that his parents, as well as the Jiang Patriarch and Matriarch, would witness it again scared him so much.

‘Yu-furen will get angry again,’ he thought internally before snapping when Lan Wangji gripped his hand tightly.

The words, *‘I’ll protect you,’* from Lan Wangji’s eyes made his heart flutter and he calmed down.

In an instant, the scene shifts to a path, where a Lan disciple is running while holding Lan Wangji's guqin, and Jiang Wanyin beside him.

“All because of our negligence, the feral corpses escaped!” The Lan disciple admitted, feeling guilty for not doing a good job guarding the Obscure Room. “Zewu-jun and Grandmaster Lan have not yet returned; we must find Lan-er-gongzi quickly!”

“You didn’t even put talismans there?” Cangse Sanren asked, frowning.

“We did not place any talisman in the Obscure room, but we did put sealing talismans to the corpses,” Lan Xichen responded and lets out a heavy sigh. “We assumed the resentment was strong enough to overpower the sealing talisman, and because I and Uncle were not present to guard the room, it successfully escaped.”

“Only the main branch of the Lans has access to the Obscure Room, right?” Cangse Sanren asked once more. Her frown deepened, because she remembered quite well how she couldn't open the doors to the Obscure Room when she was in Cloud Recesses. “How did they manage to escape?”

Lan Qiren scowled and said, “That’s something we don’t know.”

“Just say your disciples neglected their duties,” an unknown cultivator pipes in, casually shrugging as if he saw nothing offensive. Lan Xichen, Lan Wangji, and Lan Qiren glared at the man.

“Please refrain from offending our disciples, gongzi.” Lan Wangji responded, his eyes cold, making the man shiver. “The last thing our disciples would do is neglect their work. They are trying their best each day.”

Jingyi definitely did not stick his tongue out at the man; he did not.

The pair halted when they heard the groans and growling nearby and exchanged glances before dashing towards the voices.

On another path, Lan Wangji is running, wearing only his outer robes. He looks back to the feral corpse that had been chasing him since earlier.

“Oh no, run Hanguang-jun!” The disciples exclaimed.

Madam Lan and Qingheng-jun grew worried, but they reassured themselves that he would be fine, that their son would be fine.

The feral corpse was fast, almost catching up with Lan Wangji, so using one of his feet to support himself, he spun around, his white robe swaying beautifully, and snatched a small branch from a nearby tree.

Then, he swung, sending a blue stream of spiritual energy towards the corpse, the small leaves directing the attack. As soon as the leaves landed on the corpse’s forehead, the corpse was thrown back.

The cultivators were once again impressed.

“Lan-er-gege, always so good,” Wei Wuxian whispered proudly, a playful smirk on his lips.

“Wei Ying,” Lan Wangji warned.

Two more corpses appeared and Lan Wangji leaped back, effectively dodging the corpse’s attacks. He remained close to the two corpses’ range, continuing to dodge and flip until his movements slowed and wore him down.

“Lan-er-gongzi!” The Lan disciple calls, “Here’s your guqin!”

“Oh thank god,” Jiang Yanli breathed out a sigh of relief. She and Lan Wangi may not be particularly close, but she did not want to see him hurt.

The disciple throws the guqin to Lan Wangji, and the second jade jumped and caught it in mid-air. He spun once more and put his hand on the strings before strumming.

The shockwave slammed into the corpses, propelling them into the air.

Lan Qiren and Qingheng-jun smiled. The irrefutable power of the second jade has left the cultivators stupefied. This shouldn't surprise them any longer, but Lan Wangji was still young in this scene, so young and unquestionably powerful. He might even defeat a cultivator older than him.

If Lan Wangji was this powerful, it’s possible that Lan Xichen might be even more so.

“How is he so good?” Jin Ling whispered, still in disbelief.

“I strive to be as good as Hanguang-jun.”

“Me too!”

The disciples cheered, earning a giggle from Wei Wuxian and Madam Lan.

Lan Wangji landed perfectly as the bodies of the corpses landed flat on the ground, resentful energy already purified.

Jiang Wanyin rushes to his side, taking a look around. “Where’s Wei Wuxian?” he asked the second jade.

“He had been separated from me.”

Cangse Sanren and Wei Changze became agitated. Where had their son gone?

“Why did you separate from Hanguang-jun?” Mianmian inquired, fumbling her robes.

“Well, we had to separate the corpses somehow, so we separated,” Wei Wuxian replied, his expression more solemn than ever, increasing Mianmian's concern.

“Even if you don’t have your sword with you? Are you out of your mind, Wei Wuxian?” Jin Zixuan scowled slightly, and Madam Jin elbowed him, shutting him up. The man could only wince.

The screen then brings them to a dark forest, with crows making a series of loud coos and caws and the trees swaying slightly. The surroundings was dark; only the moon illuminated the entire forest.

Wei Wuxian dashed, two corpses chasing him, matching his speed. One corpse appeared in the opposite direction, heading towards him at an unimaginable speed. Without hesitation, he flipped, landing on the back of the corpse and launching forward to higher grounds. The corpse fell down, but quickly got up and chased after him again.

Wei Wuxian did not have his sword with him, so he will have to keep running and devise a way to at least hold them down or suppress them. Talismans would suffice to keep them at bay for a moment, but he didn't have any with him.

“I blame you for this,” Cangse Sanren said, glaring at Lan Qiren. The man didn't argue with her because he really was the one who brought them to Cloud Recesses in the first place. *‘How would I know they would escape?’* he thought and pondered whether he should punish himself for miscalculating.

“How is Senior Wei gonna escape that?” Zizhen mumbled, concerned for him.

“I'm certain Hanguang-jun or Sect Leader Jiang will find him,” Sizhui said with confidence. Sect Leader Jiang is already on the lookout for Senior Wei. He'll be just fine. Hopefully, nothing bad will happen to him.

Wei Wuxian remained on high ground, but being on high ground provided no advantage or safety. The corpses were still able to catch up to him, so he jumped to the ground, snatched a branch from a nearby tree, and threw it at the corpse, striking it on the forehead.

The corpse got slammed on a tree. The hit did not do much damage to the corpse; it did render it immobile for the time being, but there were still two corpses that were unharmed. Wei Wuxian was beginning to pant heavily, considering he had been running for a long time.

Jiang Wanyin clenched his fist. It wasn't his first time seeing his brother get tired while training in Lotus Pier, but it was the first time he saw his brother helpless while planning tactics that wouldn't even give him an advantage or a chance to escape. Seeing this reminded me of how he was pursued by the Wens when his brother was almost caught.

“A-Xian, please..” Jiang Yanli murmured, voice and body shaking in anxiousness, but Jin Zixuan and Jin Ling comforted her by holding both of her hands.

“Why isn't he expending resentful energy right now? It would help him escape,” an unknown cultivator said, and Wei Wuxian and Jiang Wanyin clenched their fists unconsciously.

Nie Huaisang frowned and turned to the man and said, “Resentful energy isn’t always the option, you know?”

“What? He attempted to control it in Biling Lake. Why not right now?” The man adamantly suggested. “He's clearly going through fatigue right now.”

The furrow on his brow surprised Huaisang, because this man was not speaking to hate, he was suggesting because he looked a bit worried. This should relieve him that some people are warming up to Wei Wuxian, but he knows it won't last.

Taking another deep breath, determination flashing through his eyes, he and the corpse pounced, Wei Wuxian's fist thrust forward, punching the corpse straight to the cheek, dislocating its jaw. With that strong punch, the corpse flew backwards.

Another corpse charged, forcing Wei Wuxian to dodge. At some point, the corpse got close to him, and he immediately grabbed the its arm, pulling its body closer before twisting and demonstrating a powerful kick.

A normal person would have shattered their ribs and lost consciousness at that. As a result, the corpse got slammed into the tree.

"Go Senior Wei! You can do it!"

"That kick was so good!"

Wei Changze and Cangse Sanren were worried, if not impressed, by their son's power. They were not mistaken when they said their son was skilled in combat. They only wondered what was wrong and why their son was doubting himself.

But then the corpses that Wei Wuxian had just punched and kicked jut now reappeared, slowly approaching him, growling and wobbling. Wei Wuxian's pants sagged once more, fatigue striking him twice.

The fatigue was slowing him down, providing the corpses with the ideal opportunity to attack him. Jiang Fengmian and Yu Ziyuan frowned. If no help arrives, the boy will have to keep running. Yu Ziyuan wanted to chastise the boy for not bringing his sword, but who could have predicted this? And why would he bring his sword if all he wanted was a quick bath in the cold springs?

Nie Mingjue, on the other hand, was itching to kill the corpses. It was annoying and stressful. If he could just enter the screen and slash them in half, then everything would be would go back to normal.

“Stay strong, Wei-xiong,” Nie Huaisang whispered, fanning himself anxiously.

“This is endless,” Wei Wuxian said, still panting.

“Wei Ying, run,” Wen Qing whispered, and Wen Ning approached her side.

“Jiejie, Wei-gongzi is going to be fine,” Wen Ning softly reassures her.

“I know, but I can’t help it.”

The corpses' wobbling did not last long as they dashed forward to Wei Wuxian. The boy remained motionless, panting and devising of more ways to escape. Just as the corpses were about to attack him, the scene shifts back to Jiang Wanyin whipping his head back, hearing the loud growling of the corpses nearby.

“A-Cheng, find him,” Yanli begged.

“I will, A-jie. I will.”

“Oh, thank god Sect Leader Jiang is here.”

“Save Senior Wei, Sect Leader Jiang!”

The disciples exclaimed.

“There!” Jiang Wanyin said, hastily running down the hill.

“Good, good,” Wei Changze breathes out in relief and turns to face Jiang Wanyin. “Thank you, Sect Leader Jiang,” he said, bowing his head.

Jiang Wanyin returned the bow awkwardly. “Please call me Jiang Cheng,” he insisted.

“Jiang Cheng,” Cangse Sanren said, testing his name through her lips. She smiled and bowed. “Thank you.”

Jiang Wanyin couldn't help but feel both warm and guilty that his brother's parents were this good to him. Soon, realize how horrible he is to Wei Wuxian, and he is prepared to see their disappointment and anger. He looked at his brother and noticed him smiling, as if the interaction with him and his parents made him happy.

Instantaneously, the scene returns to the forest, only to witness Wei Wuxian being thrown back, slamming into a tree, and violently coughing.

Lan Wangji couldn't help but exclaim, “Wei Ying!!” but his husband clutched his arm tightly.

“Lan Zhan, I will be fine.”

“You are not,” Lan Wangji insisted, looking down at Wei Wuxian's hands, remembering the bulging veins he saw after purifying the corpses. “You are not,” he said quietly, more breathy and shaky than he had expected.

Wei Wuxian's smile broadened. “But you will save me.”

“Mn. I will.”

Wei Wuxian quickly hides behind the tree he was slammed into. The fighting came to a halt, allowing them to hear Wei Wuxian's heavy breathing.

'Without my sword, how do I even end this fight?'

The anxiousness some cultivators had felt since earlier doubled. As smart and tactical as Wei Wuxian is, he stood no chance without a talisman or a weapon. At this point, he is completely out of options.

"This is stressful as hell," Madam Jin sighs, frustration gnawing at her bones.

"Just use resentful energy already!" exclaimed one man, who was quickly followed by another.

"Save yourself!"

Wei Wuxian could not believe he's hearing them encouraging him to use the aforementioned energy. He is uncertain if they're encouraging him to use it to bash him later, or if they're simply concerned for his safety. The latter is clearly not an option, so the former is most likely.

"Don't worry, Hanguang-jun and Sect Leader Jiang is on their way!"

"Yes! Senior Wei will be saved."

Lan Qiren was tempted to shut all the disciples up. They were becoming unbearably loud.

Right when he's about to peek, a corpse appeared, pouncing on him from behind.

The jumpscare made Yanli and Nie Huaisang flinched and hid their faces from the person close to them

“Watch out!” exclaimed Xiao Xingchen and A-Qing.

Wei Wuxian dodged the attacking hand and broke into a run, the corpses trailing behind him. He then leaps up to a tree to the higher branches. He paused to look down, only to see one corpse climbing the tree like an unhinged animal at breakneck speed. The corpse groaned and growled, its nails digging deep into the bark. Meanwhile, the two remaining corpse below violently shake the tree.

Before the climbing corpse reached him, Wei Wuxian immediately jumps down and landed safely. Then, there was a large shadow covering him and the ground. Wei Wuxian turned around, and the tree he had just jumped into collapsed.

“No!!”

“Wei Ying!!”

“Wei Wuxian!!”

“Senior Wei!!”

The hearts of some of the cultivators pounded rapidly and uncharacteristically loud. The tree that crashed down were massive. The sight of Wei Wuxian crushed beneath them was both nauseating and horrifying.

A cloud of dust engulfed the area. When the dust settles, everyone notices Wei Wuxian lying flat on the ground, unharmed.

“Oh, oh, thank goodness,” Cangse Sanren and Wei Changze sigh in relief.

But it wasn't over yet, as the three corpses began to approach him.

“Stand up, A-Xian,” Jiang Fengmian ordered. Despite the fact that Wei Wuxian had avoided such damage and remained unharmed, the fact that he was still being pursued by these corpses with no, or almost no, options left was distressing. His son was still nowhere to be found. He is hopeful that he will arrive on time and save him.

Groggily, Wei Wuxian gets to his feet, leaning on the tree for support. Wei Wuxian's head jerked to the side as he heard noises nearby. A pair of long white ears perked up and leapt towards Wei Wuxian.

“A rabbit?”

The corpses pounced, and the rabbit stared at him, oblivious to the danger. Wei Wuxian dodged and grabbed the rabbit, hiding it inside his robes.

“Why are you saving that thing?!” Yu Ziyuan demanded angrily. The act of saving the rabbit was noble and righteous, but most people would abandon it in order to save themselves first. This shouldn't surprise her; Wei Wuxian has been like this since the beginning, but it was already stressful and infuriating seeing him fight the corpses without a weapon and then he goes on saving it.

“If I were A-Xian, I would so the same, Mother,” Jiang Yanli said, looking fondly at her brother. “I would not like to see a rabbit die in front of me.”

Jin Ling absolutely will do the same thing if Fairy was in danger.

Yu Ziyuan glared, but said nothing else. Seriously, these two are eerily similar.

Lan Wangji, on the other hand, suspected that the rabbit saved by his husband was one of the rabbits he had given him. He could be wrong as well, but it doesn't matter, the fact that his husband did not hesitate to save the rabbit made his heart flutter. His husband is truly wonderful.

Wei Wuxian runs away again, his fatigue slowing him down even more. He was tired and he wanted to rest, but given that he had no opportunity to do so, he will keep running.

Wei Wuxian swiftly dodged the approaching corpse, running past it, but the sharp nails came into contact with his arm, scratching him as a result.

The cultivators winced.

“Oh no!”

“Come on, Senior Wei, you can do it!”

Jiang Wanyin and Lan Wangji regretted not arriving early. If they had, Wei Wuxian would have been safe sooner and is able to return to Gusu unharmed.

Wei Wuxian stumbled and dropped to his knees for a brief moment when a surprise attack caught him off guard. Having no time to escape, he raised his arm to block the attack.

“No!”

“Wei Ying!!”

“Wei Wuxian!!”

There was a moment of silence, and the corpses came to a halt.

“What’s going on?” Song Lan asked, tense.

“Is he okay?” Wen Qing inquired, her heart racing. She is certain her younger brother could hear it.

‘Please be okay, please be okay!’ Jiang Yanli prayed, her body slightly trembling.

Blood splattered on the ground. Slowly, Wei Wuxian’s eyes open, and he steps back in shock.

“This is..”

Whips of energy swirled around Wei Wuxian. The corpse that had attacked him stood frozen centimeters away from his hand, growling and groaning in pain as the energy is being suck out.

The cultivators gasped in shock.

Jiang Wanyin and Lan Wangji are finally seeing what had happened before they arrived, and they couldn't be more disappointed with themselves.

“He did not know,” Lan Qiren’s breathe out, face aghast. “He did not realize.”

“He is finally using it,” an elderly man exclaimed, delighted, but it was more of a mocking delight.

“But he used it against his will!” Mianmian defended.

“Using it without his will or not, he is still controlling it!” The man insisted, his expression angry.

“Yeah, why do you feel the need to defend him?!” Another man accusingly points at Wei Wuxian.

“Why you—”

“Jiang Cheng, stop!” Wei Wuxian shouted, and Jiang Wanyin turned back to him, face red with rage, but when he saw his brother's tired expression, he gritted his teeth and stepped back.

“Why you do insist that he’s controlling it with his will?” Baoshan Sanren asked calmly, whips of gold energy swirling her hand. They were suddenly reminded of the man who had been kicked out earlier and gulped anxiously.

“Because he’s the grandmaster of demonic cultivation!” The man proudly answered. Some cultivators nodded their heads in agreement.

Baoshan Sanren laughs, startling them all. “Grandmaster….How stupid of you,” she grumbles and smiled. Her wicked smile gave the cultivators goosebumps, but it vanished in an instant. “You insist on things you don’t clearly have knowledge of. At this point, you deserve the spot as the Grandmaster of Foolishness.”

The disciples, Wei Wuxian, and Cangse Sanren definitely did not snort. They did not.

“You fucking—”

“Disrespect my Grandmaster once, and you'll definitely face me,” Cangse Sanren threatens, gripping the hilt of his sword tightly.

“Resentful energy?!”

A heartbeat echoed on the screen. Wei Wuxian's eyes widened as he gasped, trying to move his arm but was unable to. The resentful energy crept up his arm and into his entire body. His skin became snowy white, and veins began to protrude. He thrashed to get away but he remained stuck until the scene changed to a dark space and a golden core came into existence.

Many cultivators widened their eyes and gasped. Wei Wuxian, on the other hand, stared wistfully at his own core.

“G-Golden core?” Lan Xichen stammered, having never seen a golden core before.

Wei Changze shakes his head, as if he’s in denial. “No, don’t tell me..”

Jiang Wanyin and Wen Qing were shaking in their places. It was Wei Wuxian's core, which Wei Wuxian had given away for his brother, and it is now on Jiang Wanyin's body. His hand unconsciously moved to where his golden core was and clutched it as if he wanted to rip it out. He's not going to cry now. This isn't even the beginning of what's to come.

The golden core glowed and burned like fire. Wei Wuxian knelt down, clutching his chest in pain. Painful gasps escaped his lips, and the veins on his face began to bulge as well. The resentful energy was rapidly spreading throughout his body. His body trembled violently, and his breathing became more labored.

“Senior Wei,” Sizhui whispered, jaw clenched in concern.

Jin Ling stared at the screen wide eyed. He could not move not speak. It like he's paralyzed. TWei Wuxian's current pain may be similar to the pain he felt when his core was surgically

removed, but less painful. He does not make sense, he is sure, but he could imagine it and it's making all of his hair stand.

Coming from someone affected from his growing saber spirit's thirst, Nie Mingjue feels and understands the boy's pain that that he can't help but feel sorry for him. But the thing that he did not understand why Wei Wuxian strayed from his sword path after experiencing this. Whatever reason he had, he hoped it justified all the boy's past wrongdoings.

"Wei Ying," Lan Wangji stammered, his voice cracking as he drew closer to his husband. "Wei Ying."

"Lan Zhan, I will be fine," Wei Wuxian softly reassured, but it did not comfort Lan Wangji at all.

Half of the cultivators were terrified for Wei Wuxian, their attention solely on the screen, hoping and praying for help to arrive. The other half, on the other hand, silently rejoiced at the sight of the Yiling Patriarch in pain.

"Perhaps he tried to control resentful energy so much that his core got damaged that's why he turned to demonic cultivation?" a young man inquired.

"That's what I'm thinking as well."

"That, however, is not the case. Lan Clan can use their Gusu songs to mitigate the effects of resentful energy, so his core would have been better or fixed a long time ago."

"But why.."

"I don't know.."

The corpse that had frozen earlier began to walk, slightly wobbling and walking past Wei Wuxian. He turned to glance at the corpse. “Why—”

“Wei Wuxian!” A voice called.

“A-Cheng,” Jiang Yanli sighs relievedly. “A-Cheng, you finally arrived.

“Sect Leader Jiang is here!”

“Thank god!”

The disciples cheered loudly.

“Take your sword!”

The sword gleamed in mid-air before hitting to the ground. Jiang Wanyin flies down and landed, expertly slashing down and dodging the corpses. Wei Wuxian remained on his knees on the ground.

“What? Too scared to even seize your sword?” Jiang Wanyin inquired, looking over at his brother.

With his hands trembling, Wei Wuxian reached forward to get his sword. “No…” he rasped, “no such thing!”

Jiang Wanyin's eyes narrowed and widened as he realized what had happened.

The corpse who walked past Wei Wuxian began to move and attack, but a blinding blue spiritual energy accompanied by a guqin sound attacks the corpse instead. From afar,

Lan Wangji, From afar, Lan Wangji, looking ever so elegantly like an immortal, stands on a cliff, guqin in hand, watching the two from afar.

“Hanguang-jun is here as well!”

“Perfect timing Hanguang-jun!”

Cangse Sanren and Wei Changze express their gratitude to Lan Wangji and Jiang Wanyin by bowing. The two cultivators gladly returned the bow.

“Lan-er-gonzi,” he disciple says, “the three remaining feral corpses are here.”

“Send them back to the Obscure Room without fail,” Lan Wangji responded as Wei Wuxian struggled to stand. Lan Wangji turns to face him and notices his hand slightly shaking, but his eyes narrow when he notices the bulging veins in his hand, but he could approach the other, Jiang Wanyin steps in, blocking his brother's hand from the second jade.

“Thank you, Lan-er-gongzi, for your help,” Jiang Wanyin said, the Jiang Sect’s bell swaying slightly on his waist. “It’s late. We’ll express our gratitude properly on another day.”

Lan Wangji stared at the brothers for a moment before turning away and saying, “No need,” then he walks away.

Perhaps leaving the brothers to talk about what happened was the best decision. Lan Wangji suspected that the bulging veins in his hands were caused by resentful energy and wanted to talk about it, but when the Jiang heir blocked Wei Wuxian’s hand, he knew right away that it was none of his business to ask.

After Lan Wangji had left, Jiang Wanyin grabbed Wei Wuxian's collar and slammed him into the tree

“Wei Wuxian! Tell me, what was going on just now?!” Jiang Jiang Wanyin demanded, but his brother only stared at him, uncertain what to respond to him. “You didn’t…” he denies and dropped his gaze down to his brother’s bulging veins.

Jiang Wanyin closed his eyes, trying to calm himself. If he knew, if he only knew what happened before. He strongly believed his brother used resentful energy simply because he was interested in it, prompting him to experiment on it; but no, his brother did not even realize he was using the said energy, sucking it out of the corpse’s system. Why did he assume his brother would do worse? Why didn't he have enough faith in his brother?

Knowing the answers to those questions, he sighs.

Yu Ziyuan had been frowning the moment she witnessed the boy unconsciously sucking the resentful energy out of the corpse. She's still appalled at how Wei Wuxian did it. Even though she knows the boy tried manipulating the resentful energy out of desperation in the last scene, in this one, he was controlling it against his will. Not only that, but it was easy for him to suck the energy out. The consequences were inevitable, of course, considering it is resentful energy, but she's still trying to figure it out. Was this truly a foreshadowing of Wei Wuxian's future control over resentful energy?

“You are out of your mind!!” Jiang Wanyin exclaimed, angry and concerned. “Don’t you know it’s a heretic path?! If anyone finds out, the cultivation world will not allow your existence!”

The cultivators flinched, and some of them agreed.

“Even Sect Leader Jiang is aware,” a man said, smirking widely. “Why did you not listen?”

Hearing the man, Yu Ziyuan simply responded, “He’s an animal refusing to be tamed with words and rules, what do you expect?”

“Yu Ziyuan,” Cangse Sanren seethes. “How much do you despise my son?” she demanded, Wei Changze holding her back from attacking.

The Jiang Matriarch, expert at making everyone mad at her, simply responded, “More than what you can imagine.”

Wei Wuxian bit his lower lip. He is well aware that the Jiang Matriarch despises him, but hearing it from her mouth again, hurts.

Because of this response, Wei Changze could feel his anger rising. “What did my son ever do to you, Yu-furen?” he asked calmly, but Jiang Fengmian saw right through him.

“Mother, please—**”**

“Stay put and shut your mouth, Wei Ying!” Cangse Sanren exclaimed.

“Cangse, San-niang, please,” Jiang Fengmian pleads. “Not now.”

‘These two families are really a mess,’ the cultivators thought simultaneously.

‘If being unruly and stubborn would lead to my demise, I would have preferred to be as well behaved and good as Lan Zhan.’ Wei Wuxian thought, his eyed hooded. But being unruly and mischievous is what makes him—him. His mother is like him too, so he should be proud. After all, Lan Zhan admired and loved him for simply being him.

Jin Ling turned to his Uncle, Wei Wuxian, before focusing his attention back to the screen.

“Wei Wuxian!! Are you listening?!” Jiang Wanyin demanded, slamming him into the tree once more. After the yelling at him, the Jiang heir began to breathe heavily.

Lan Wangji clenched his fist, furious at the sight of his husband being yelled at and slammed; his hatred for Sect Leader Jiang still exists to this day.

Wei Wuxian pursed his lips, allowing himself to be scolded and yelled at, feeling empty and dead on the inside.

Jiang Wanyin never had the desire to punch his younger self until today. He'll undoubtedly repeat this wish until the memory ends.

“Oh, A-Xian,” Jiang Yanli said mumbled, feeling bad for her brothers. She completely understood her brother's rage as he was only concerned about his older brother. She wished she could be there to console and comfort them, and maybe even offer them soup afterwards.

“Never again…” Wei Wuxian whispered, barely audible.

Some cultivators snorted, knowing he would later eat his words. Lan Xichen and Lan Wangji glared at them again, instantly silencing them.

Jiang Wanyin's eyes widened in surprise and shock at his brother's silent response, which contrasted with his loud and mischievous nature.

“It’s such a dangerous thing,” Wei Wuxian silently adds, gripping his sword tightly. “How would I dare to use it?” Looking up at his brother, he forced a smile and declares, “I will never do it again.”

The way he sounded so sincere made everyone uneasy. Whether they felt guilty or not, nobody knew, but it was unfortunate that he ate his own words and broke his promise.

“Look at him now, being the grandmaster of demonic cultivation,” a man laughed.

“What a shame.”

“Oh, come on,” an irritated female cultivator groaned. These men had been spewing hatred and nonsense since the beginning, and it was becoming increasingly irritating. “At least laugh at him if you made an impact on the cultivation world or something.”

“Don't forget, he invented more useful tools than any of you here,” the female cultivator’s friend pipes in. “Seriously, don't be too proud of your loud mouths, no one likes it.”

The man's face flushed with desire to approach the woman, but he abruptly stop mid-way when Baoshan Sanren glared at him.

Lan Wangji wishes to learn their names and thank them personally as soon as possible.

Then Wei Wuxian's robes shifted, and the rabbit he had saved earlier peered out its head, ears twitching, and the screen darkened.

They completely overlooked the fact that the boy had saved a cute little furball. Funny how they suddenly remembered Wei Wuxian saving the Wen-remnants from Jin's clutches and establishing a home in the Burial Mounds.

Zizhen approaches Sizhui and Jingyi. “You think that’s the rabbit Senior Wei gave to Hanguang-jun?” he inquired, eyes twinkling.

“It might be,” Sizhui answered. He’s certain that’s the one, but his Xian-gege probably looked for another one so the other rabbit would have company.

“That’s the end of this memory,” Baoshan Sanren said and waves her hand as the screen faded temporarily. “I'm proposing to erect privacy barriers in case any of you want to speak privately to your loved ones; do any of you want this to happen?” she inquired. Cangse Sanren was the first to raise her hand.

“Me and Changze would like to speak with our son,” she say, and the immortal nods. A golden barrier materialized around the couple. Lan Wangji did not hesitate to let go of his husband. Before entering the barrier, Wei Wuxian smiles at his husband.

“My wife and I would like to as well.”

“The same for me and my wife.”

And as Jiang Fengmian and Qingheng-jun requested, golden barriers materialized in their places. While the three parents’ talked privately, the others were left to talk about what they saw among themselves, and they were, of course, discussing resentful energy, and Wei Wuxian, as always. She despises the way they despise Wei Wuxian when the man is nothing but a good and kind man.

“A-Niang, will you tell me more about what you and father did in the past?” Jin Ling inquired, in Zixuan and Jiang Yanli exchanged glances. They weren't on good terms in the beginning, but it won't hurt to share how they fell in love with each other.

“Sure, son,” Jin Zixuan says as he draws his son closer.

Inside the golden barrier, Wei Wuxian was uneasy. His parents were looking at him, scrutinizing their gaze as if they’re trying to memorize all of the small details of his features, but he knew, he knew what his parents were going to ask.

“Wei Ying,” Wei Changze begins solemnly. “Tell us the truth, who killed you?”

Wei Wuxian’s eyes widened in surprise. That was not the question he had anticipated hearing. He expected his father to inquire if he died, which he basically did.

Cangse Sanren gripped his son's hand tightly and pleaded, “We need to know, Wei Ying,”

His mother was on the verge of crying. She had probably been holding back her tears for quite some time. Wei Wuxian pressed his lips together. While he is fine with explaining, everything was extremely complicated. He was certain his parents would be perplexed, but he couldn't lie to them. They'd find out eventually.

“No one killed me,” he clarified after a minute of silence. His parents remained silent, waiting patiently for him to continue explaining. “I died of backlash.” He explained.

Wei Changze cocked his brow. “Backlash? From what?”

Is he really going to explain the Stygian Tiger Amulet's creation until the time he destroyed it? Perhaps not. At the very least, he will give them an idea.

“From something I created,” he explained further and paused once more. “A very dangerous creation.”

His parents looked like they were both shocked and half expected this response from him. Did his parents truly believe he was killed? That his brother had killed him?

“Then, Wei Ying,” Wei Changze begins again, and this time, Wei Wuxian is fully prepared for his father’s question.

“What’s the name of the creation?”

“Stygian Tiger Amulet.”

Chapter End Notes

So here's the thingl: I was working on another fanart and decided to include it here, but the scene in the fanart isn't in this chapter, so I will include it in another chapter instead.

Another thing is that my final exam is this week, so I might be busy again, and updating another chapter will probably take a long time, but I will try to update sooner.

I appreciate everyone's patience.

See you on the next chapter!

Returning Home

Chapter Notes

This is by far the most lengthy chapter yet. Have fun reading!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“Stygian Tiger Amulet?” Wei Changze inquired, his brow furrowed.

“Yes,” Wei Wuxian responded. “The Stygian Tiger Amulet’s powers are greater than mine. Unlike many spiritual weapons, which only respond to their owners, the Stygian Tiger Amulet is not bound to anyone.”

“I did not really create it. The viewing will show you later, and then I will explain,” Wei Wuxian said, and his parents both nodded in agreement. Cangse Sanren stares at his son for a moment before sighing and embracing him tightly. This was not what she and her husband intended to discuss with their son.

“Wei Ying,” Cangse Sanren says softly, combing his hair. “I and your father apologize for leaving you, for not being there as you grew up, and for not being there to protect you.” Her lips trembled, unable to express how she truly felt. Anger, fear, worry, shame, love, and grief were all jumbled up inside of her.

“We should have not left the inn,” Wei Changze adds, wrapping his arms around his wife and son. “We should have never left in the first place.”

Wei Wuxian felt tears well up in the corners of his eyes and buried his face against her mother's shoulder. He was really hoping that his parents would not disappear as soon as the viewing concluded because he had no idea what he would do if he lost them again. They’re very precious to him. He loves them so much, that it hurts.

“Don’t apologize,” Wei Wuxian choked a sob. “You’re both here now, that’s all that matters.”

He wishes he was in his former body so that his parents could see his true appearance rather than some stranger's face and body. He imagines how his parents would react if they saw their handsome son. He gets all warm just thinking about it.

“We love you very much, you know that, right?”

“Yes, mother. I love you both.”

They broke the hug, and Cangse Sanren’s expression became solemn. “A-Ying, I want you to tell me something honestly,” she began, and the nervousness crawling in Wei Wuxian’s bones resurfaced.

Then, he responded with a small, “What?”

“Were you abused in the Jiang household?” she inquired, and it did not go unnoticed to Wei Wuxian that his father clenched his jaw.

“No!” he responded hastily, waving his hand. “I was not; I deserved every punishment any —”

“Wei Ying,” Cangse Sanren warned.

“I—I…” he gulps, not wanting to admit it, but he couldn't lie to his parents, not when they're worried about him. “Yu-furen is just sad and insecure, her anger towards me is justified,” he admitted half-heartedly, but of course, his parents knew better.

They were enveloped in silence. Wei Changze and Cangse Sanren waited patiently for their son to respond as if they knew it would be difficult for him to admit something he didn't want the world to know. Then, Wei Wuxian finally responded, “Yes, mother.....yes.”

Wei Changze and Cangse Sanren rushed forward to re-embrace their son, exchanging knowing glances, then towards the Jiang Matriarch and Patriarch, and Wei Wuxian could swear he felt a surge of resentment from his mother and father. Overwhelmingly so that he felt as if he were being suffocated by it. He supposed their resentment towards the Jiang Matriarch and Patriarch was justified, but he didn't want a fight to happen while he was present and the viewing was still going on.

Jiang Wanyin observed his brother being embraced by his parents as if to protect him from them. His parents' embrace makes him want to cry. He wants to be hugged in the same way, as if his parents' lives depended on it. He craves so much that he fears things will worsen, but his parents were not like his brother's parents. His parents were toxic to one another. The last hug he received was from his mother during the attack on Lotus Pier. He lowered his head and glanced at where his parents were.

He observes, and it appears that they are conversing effectively; no yelling or anything. It's surprising and worrying, he has to say, because they're constantly fighting, even over trivial matters, but perhaps they're willing to change, and he's scared because he wants it so badly.

"Qingheng-jun, you have to tell me why you chose to marry me despite the fact that I killed someone," she said softly, and it did not go unnoticed to her that her husband flinched.

"I wanted to protect you," He responded, summoning the courage to tell her everything right this moment.

"I don't hold affection for you, Qingheng-jun," she admitted bluntly, but her tone remained soft.

Qingheng-jun sighs. It hurt. It was excruciatingly painful those words from her. He was aware that his wife did not reciprocate his feelings. Only he experienced love at first sight. When he found out that his wife had murdered one of his teachers for unspecified reasons, he was torn between not forgiving her and protecting her from his clan's elders, but in the end, he chose imprisonment as her punishment and seclusion for himself.

"I know," he admitted with difficulty, yet he still forced a smile.

“Before I died, you did not come to see me,” she said, walking closer to him and staring at him as if she was staring directly into his lonely, corrupted soul.

“If I did, I'm afraid I'd cause you harm, and I don't want that,” he responded honestly. The words, ‘*I wanted to see you every day, I wanted to be by your side even for a second,’* did not escape his lips, and chose to keep it to himself. “When you died, I was devastated. I wanted to end my seclusion just to see you, but I kept my promise to my elders—”

“I hope you did,” she interjected, startling him. “Apart from seeing my sons once a month, I was lonely. I needed to speak with someone.”

Qingheng-jun could feel his heart breaking. He knew that imprisonment was one of the worst punishments there was, but it was also one of the safest; he could deeply relate to her.

He opened his mouth to say something, but he could not find the right words, so instead, he said, “I’m sorry.”

Madam Lan sighs, half expecting this response from him. She understood that Lan’s are true to their words, yet that did not stop the disappointment she felt. Sure, she did not hold affection for the Sect Leader, but he was a good man, so good that she felt guilty marrying him because of her crime.

“Do you regret it?” he asked, his voice unmistakably low, as if afraid of being heard and hearing an answer he didn't want to hear.

“Do I regret meeting you? Of course not,” she replied earnestly, and the tension in Qingheng-jun's shoulders dissipated. “And, before you ask, I don't regret having given birth to A-Zhan and A-Huan; they're precious to me,” she adds, looking at her two grown-up sons, pride and love filling her heart.

Qingheng-jun smiled and took her hand in his, holding it like a fragile glass, afraid it would break at any moment. He should despise her for murdering his teacher, but his love for her overpowers his hatred, making it feel like a curse. This woman in front of her, so beautiful and kind; he does not deserve her.

“I wish for us to start over,” he said, looking down at their joined hands. “Whether you reciprocate my affections or not, I would like to stay by your side,” a pause, swallowing a lump in his throat. “As a friend,” he concludes, and it feels so wrong to say that, but simply being her friend is enough. He may want so much, but he will try to hold back, so as to not lose this given opportunity.

Madam Lan pondered this. She may not have reciprocated his feelings in the past, but that was because he knew so little about him, and now, she wished to know him better now that they'd been given another chance in a lifetime. If they are successful in learning and discovering secrets, stories, and details about themselves, she is confident that she will gradually return his feelings.

“Aren’t you supposed to hate me?” she asked, hoping to find out if he harbored any ill will toward her, but who was she kidding? The way he looks at her and holds her affectionately suggests otherwise, but no one can be certain. But admittedly so, she’s certain that she does not deserve this look from this good man. For a criminal like her, this feels like torture. “I really need you to hate me, Qingheng-jun,” she whispered.

“I suppose I did, but in the end I cannot. My love for you outweighs my hatred,” he admitted, making Madam Lan flush slightly. “But you never explained to me why you murdered my teacher.

Shaking her head, she responded, “Yes, I did not.”

“Then,” he paused. “Will you explain to me? Not now, but when you're ready; I'll be here to hear it all.”

“Alright, I will, Qingheng-jun,” she said, forcing a smile Qingheng-jun is so familiar with.

“San-niang,” Jiang Fengmian began. “I know you'd never forgive me. As a father and a Sect Leader, I failed on many things for being a coward and for overlooking problems I should’ve been paying attention to,” he said, carefully observing his wife’s face. There’s a scowl on her face, indicating that she was both pleased and irritated by his words.

“Yes, you did,” she said bluntly. “You failed to speak the truth about the rumors concerning you and Wei Wuxian. You unconsciously neglected our son and concentrated your attention on him. It is tremendously scarring on A-Cheng’s psyche that his own father does not regard him as highly as his brother. Tell me, Jiang Fengmian, was it not because she's Cangse Sanren's child that you favored him more than Jiang Cheng?” her frown deepened, hands clenching tightly, obviously holding her anger back.

“Did you refuse to clear up the rumors because you preferred Wei Wuxian and Cangse Sanren as your family over us? Speak honestly, Fengmian,” she asked again.

Jiang Fengmian couldn't speak, the words stabbing him thrice in his heart. He was aware of his mistakes, and he exacerbates them by failing to acknowledge and correct them, preferring to ignore them and pretend nothing happened the next day. It was the worst, Yu Ziyuan resented him.

Yu Ziyuan was also aware that besides this, she was an insecure woman, mistaken for a confident woman with a good family. If she had to say so, her insecurities were not *'wrong'*. She knows because Jiang Fengmian makes it clear that she is not his first choice for a wife; Cangse Sanren will always be his first. Her husband's lavish love and praise for Wei Wuxian were a projection of his love for the rogue cultivator. Of course, the knowledge hurt her, painfully so, but as a proud woman, she didn't show it, because expressing her insecurities and pain would be pointless. Jiang Fengmian would dismiss it immediately.

“It was not because he’s Cangse Sanren’s child, and it was not because I prefer them as my family over—”

“You still failed to clear up the rumors, Fengmian. Other than that, what else could be the reason?!” she snapped. She was aware that her insecurities were showing, but she did not care, it showed in the past anyway. Her husband either failed to notice it or acknowledged it but chose to do nothing about it. It was so frustrating.

“It was pointless, San-niang!” he exclaimed. “People will create and listen to rumors whether they are cleared up or not. And I had to be strict with Jiang Cheng, San-niang,” he spoke truthfully. “A-Cheng is the next Sect Leader of Yunmeng Jiang, and—”

“If you didn't know, speaking the truth helps, Fengmian!” she interrupts, frustration and anger leaking immensely. “And that still doesn't explain why you didn't lavish A-Cheng with praise and affection he craved so much from you! You failed to acknowledge all his achievements!” she seethes.

“San-niang, we both failed to do that,” he interjected, leaving the Jiang Matriarch speechless. Yes, she verbally abused both Wei Wuxian and Jiang Fengmian, as well as her own son. Both of them were abusive in their own ways—neglect, blatant favoritism, and verbal abuse. She clenched her teeth and forced herself to calm down.

“Fine, we both failed,” she admitted half-heartedly. “Then what? Are you telling me to change?”

“No,” he hurriedly protested, continuing, “Let's become better people to each other—better parents for our children, San-niang,” he said, making Yu Ziyuan even more speechless that she couldn't help but stare at him as if he'd sprouted a new head.

“As I said, I was aware of my mistakes in the past; you must be as well,” he forced a smile, recalling their last fight before the fall of Lotus Pier, “but I cannot afford for our family to be a mess again now that we've been given a chance to be better. I want us to try and understand each other; no fights, no lashing out, just communicating properly,” he said.

She scoffs mockingly. “I'm not sure, Fengmian. It’s not easy as you say. You could repeat the same mistake again with Wei Wuxian and Cangse Sanren around. You don’t even love me,” she muttered, and then realized what she had said. Yu Ziyuan was forced to look away as her husband's eyes widened and his lips gaped slightly. She cursed herself for showing a bit of vulnerability that she had kept hidden for a long time. Was she already this desperate for his love and attention?

Then, Jiang Fengmian smiled, so brightly that Yu Ziyuan wanted to wipe it off his face. What was so amusing about it? Was he mocking her for showing some weakness?

“San-niang,” he said affectionately, causing Yu Ziyuan to wince. Why was he suddenly acting this way? Was he possessed by an evil spirit? Whether he did or not, the smile was oddly strange and pleasing.

Jiang Fengmian loved her. While he was not his first choice for a wife, she was different; very different from Cangse Sanren, but in a good way. He did not love her at first, but it's safe to say there was something that gradually developed as they went through the years as husband and wife. The only problem they have was that they were both different and their opinions differ from one another, failing to communicate properly. His heart blossomed. It felt as if he had just soared to the skies for a moment.

"You love me?" he asked softly, and this caught Yu Ziyuan off guard.

She was silent for a moment before speaking, "That's not the point, Jiang Fengmian," she said, trying to steer the conversation elsewhere. "Cangse Sanren—"

"Please, San-niang," he begs, never taking his gaze away from her amethyst orbs. "Speak honestly."

They simply stared at each other in silence. Then, Yu Ziyuan snapped to her stupor and scoffs, "If I admit it, I know for sure you will never reciprocate."

"Who says I won't?" he said solemnly, surprising Yu Ziyuan yet again.

"Who are you joking, Fengmian? I'd know because you've never tried to—"

"I tried."

"When, Fengmian, when?!" she countered. "Not even once did you show affection to me and to our children, and you tell me now that you love me?! Ha! You don't Fengmian, you just because I am not the woman you desired!" she exclaimed. Now everything's out—she finally succumbs to her insecurities. "I am not Cangse Sanren!"

Jiang Fengmian stood there watching his wife breathe heavily, shame and guilt consuming him all over again. Then, he sighs. “Yes, you are not Cangse Sanren, you are my wife, Yu Ziyuan,” he said, reaching for her hand, only to have her flinch, forcing him to withdraw. He continues, “I loved her first, I cannot deny that, but I loved you second and will be the last woman I will ever love till death,” he smiled, and Yu Ziyuan was at a loss for words. She couldn't figure out what to make of this declaration.

She stares and shakes her head in denial, backing away from him. “What nonsense! Just stop, you don’t love me!”

“Are you going to decide who I love now?” He countered. Yu Ziyuan turned away, deafeningly quiet as she refused to respond. Seeing that his wife did not want to speak, he spoke, “You don't get to choose because it is my choice, and my choice is you.” He glanced at their children, Jiang Cheng talking to Lan Xichen and Yanli talking to her husband and son, then back to her.

“Let's start over, become better, and communicate properly, San-niang,” he said, stretching out his hand, and Yu Ziyuan stared, stunned and strangely overwhelmed. “It doesn't have to be now, but we could start slowly.”

‘Yes, I want,’ Yu Ziyuan's mind screamed, but she was still hesitant and overwhelmed with emotions she believed would never resurface again. Was she prepared to be vulnerable in front of her husband? Were they ready to understand each other? Was he ready to improve his relationship with her? All of these questions occupied Yu Ziyuan's mind, and she desired an immediate response because she didn't know what to do, but in order to know the answer, she had to do it. She must, for the sake of her family, him, and herself. Then, in a heartbeat, she took his hand in hers, and Jiang Fengmian gripped it tightly.

“Fine.”

Outside the privacy barriers, Jiang Wanyin almost choked on his saliva, while Lan Xichen seemed pleased with the development.

“Am I seeing right? This isn't real, is it?” he mindlessly asked himself.

“You’re seeing fine, Sect Leader Jiang,” Lan Xichen said beside him, smiling, “you must be happy.”

“Perhaps, I don't know,” Jiang Wanyin said, uncertain, yet his heart is pounding loudly. Have the Gods granted his long-awaited wish?

Then, with a snap of Baoshan Sanren’s fingers, the privacy barriers dissipated, confusing those who were inside. “The viewing will resume,” she says, and the screen lights up.

“Oh, I’m so excited about what comes next!” Nie Huaisang chirped, fanning himself.

The next day, Lan Wangji sat before the desk in the library, practicing his calligraphy. However, outside the pavilion was Wei Wuxian climbing the magnolia tree. As soon as Lan Wangji heard a creaking noise coming from the window, he looked up to see someone hop inside.

Lan Qiren resisted the urge to groan, while Cangse Sanren looked rather pleased.

“Lan Zhan, I’m back!” Wei Wuxian beams. “How have you been without me copying scriptures with you? Did you miss me?” he teased.

“You, leave,” Lan Wangji ordered.

“Hanguang-jun, you’re really going to regret saying that,” Jingyi said, shaking his head.

And yes, he did, and he’s never going to forget how he pushed his love away just because of new feelings that arose within him, yet he could not blame his past self for doing so. Because, while he had met many disciples in the past while hunting and lecturing, no one as daring as Wei Wuxian had ever dared to tease and talk to him shamelessly. Maybe it was his insistence on teasing and talking to him that caused the walls he built in his heart to slowly crumble.

“Aiya, don't say that Jingyi, you're hurting him,” Wei Wuxian said, teasing the disciple, yet Lan Wangji knew that his husband meant it.

“How am I hurting Hanguang-jun?” he wondered, his head tilted in confusion.

“You will know soon,” Lan Xichen interjected. “Just avoid saying that, Jingyi.”

“I am fine, brother,” Lan Wangji reminded.

“If I don’t, will you throw me down?” Wei Wuxian asked, his eyes sparkling with amusement. The desire to agitate the second jade was intense.

“Please, why does Wangji have to suffer like this?” Lan Qiren sigh, earning a light laugh from Lan Xichen.

Looking at the second jade's face, Wei Wuxian suspected that if he said one more sentence, Lan Wangji would completely abandon any remaining self-control and nail him to the window right this instant.

“Now that’s an exaggeration,” Madam Jin remarked, chuckling.

“He tends to exaggerate everything,” Jin Zixuan said and Wei Wuxian glared at him.

“And you’re still pompous,” Wei Wuxian countered, and it was Jin Zixuan’s turn to glare at him.

“A-Xian, A-Xuan,” Yanli called, but it felt like she was reprimanding the two.

“Sorry, Shijie.”

“Sorry, A-Li.”

Jin Ling resisted the urge to laugh.

Wei Wuxian quickly added, “Don’t be so scary! I’m here to apologize by giving you a present.”

Without thinking twice about it, Lan Wangji refused, saying, “No.”

“I'm guessing Wei Wuxian gave him the rabbit he saved,” Nie Mingjue said, placing his hand on his chin.

“Could be,” Nie Huaisang concurs.

“Are you sure?” Wei Wuxian asked again, but when he saw the guarded look in the second jade's eyes, he fished out two rabbits from his robes, as if performing a magic trick.

“Aww, so cute!” Yanli coos at the sight of the two snowballs.

“That’s so adorable!”

“I wish someone would also give me a rabbit.”

“Hey, the other rabbit is the one Senior Wei saved!”

“Oh yeah, that’s right!”

Sizhui and Jingyi grinned, knowing their suspicions were correct.

The other was the one he had previously saved, and the black one, which was identical to the other, was the one he had caught earlier this morning. Smiling, he lifted them in front of Lan Wangji's eyes, "It's actually quite strange here. There aren't any pheasants, but there are lots of wild rabbits," he said, sharing his observation. "They aren't even scared of people. What do you think? Aren't they fat? Do you want them?"

"Those rabbits were among the ones below the mountain, aren't they?" Lan Qiren asked Lan Xichen, torn between scolding his nephew and letting him be.

Recognizing his uncle's inner turmoil, he raised his sleeve to cover his smile and replied, "Yes, Uncle."

"Are there more rabbits in Cloud Recesses?" Madam Lan inquired, and Lan Wangji nodded, his ears blushing slightly.

"Mother and Father may see them," Lan Wangji offers, and both parents smiled.

"We'd like that."

Lan Wangji stared at the bunnies indifferently for a moment, and it appeared that he would continue to do so, so Wei Wuxian interrupted, "Fine. If you don't want them, I'm going to give them to other people. In any case, there aren't many flavors in our mouths."

"You're not thinking of eating them, are you?" Jin Ling inquired, his gaze suspiciously fixed on Wei Wuxian.

“Of course not,” Wei Wuxian replied, but the corner of his lips quirked and Jin Ling shuddered. “But you should know, rabbit meat is very delicious; I and Jiang Cheng have roasted a lot of them in the past.”

Jin Ling and Lan Wangji’s expressions morphed into horror, and Wei Wuxian couldn’t help but burst out laughing.

“Senior Wei, you should not eat them,” Sizhui said, his sweat dripping.

“Yeah, cute things aren’t meant to be eaten,” Zizhen adds, complexion was dangerously pale that Wen Qing was beginning to worry that the boy would pass out at any moment. Jiang Yanli chuckled hearing the exchange.

Jin Ling turned to face Jiang Wanyin, who turned away. That gesture only confirmed Wei Wuxian's words.

After Lan Wangji heard the last sentence, he hurried to say, “Stop.”

Wei Wuxian smiled and extended his arms. “I’m not going anywhere.”

“To whom are you giving them?” Lan Wangji demanded.

“Who do you have in mind, Wangji?” Lan Xichen asked, and Lan Wangji recognized the teasing tone in his voice and refused to answer.

“Er-gege, answer Zewu-jun, who do you think I’d give them to?” Wei Wuxian wiggled his brows, anticipating his husband's response, yet he also expected that he would not speak, given his red ears. *‘He’s embarrassed,’* he thought, suddenly overcome with fondness, but he chose to press the matter. “Nie Huaisang? Jiang Cheng?” he suggested, and Jiang Wanyin glared at him.

“Why are you saying my name, Wei Wuxian?” he demanded. “Are you talking shit about me?”

“Never, Chengcheng!”

“Stop with the Chengcheng!”

“Chengcheng!”

“Ugh!”

Wei Wuxian smirked. “I’m going to give them to whoever’s good at roasting rabbit meat.”

“Killing is forbidden in the Cloud Recesses!” Lan Qiren and several Lan disciples exclaimed, eliciting laughter from some cultivators.

Looking at the young Wei Wuxian on the screen, so young and obnoxious, Lan Qiren realized he had been scolding him and still saw him as his own student rather than a demonic cultivator and a patriarch. Had his heart suddenly softened? He asked, but instead of seeking an answer, he chose not to.

“I swear they worship their rules more than God himself,” an amused female cultivator remarked.

“How tasty is rabbit meat exactly?” Mianmian inquired.

“Tastes a bit like chicken meat, tough with slightly stronger, meatier, and earthier flavor,” Nie Huaisang supplied, and those who had heard him gaped slightly while nodding their heads.

“You had rabbit meat before?” Nie Mingjue asked, his eyes full of silent scolding, but Huaisang knew he'd be scolded by him anyway. “Within Cloud Recesses?” the older Nie adds.

Glancing away from his older brother, Nie Huaisang uneasily responded, “Yes, Da-ge.”

The sigh the previous Sect Leader Nie let out and the face-palming just made Huaisang step away from him.

“Should we try, Sizhui?” Jingyi asked.

“Hanguang-jun would never forgive you,” Sizhui deadpanned, and Jingyi could swear he can picture Hanguang-jun looking down at him with silent anger and disappointment and he shudders.

“Nope, never mind then.”

“Killing is forbidden in the Cloud Recesses,” Lan Wangji reprimanded flatly. “It is the third rule on the Wall of rules.”

Wei Wuxian sighed. “Fine, then. I’ll go down the mountain, kill it outside, and bring it back inside to roast it; you don't want it anyway, so why are you so concerned?”

“And you think that’s the solution?” Jin Ling asked, eyes rolling. “You might as well roast it and eat it outside then.”

“"I never intended to eat them anyway,” Wei Wuxian remarked, crossing his arms.

Lan Wangji remained silent for a moment, his gaze fixed on the two rabbits, their legs kicking around in an attempt to escape the latter's clutches. After deciding, he spoke one word at a time, “Give. It. To. Me.”

Wei Wuxian giggled. “Now you want them? Look at you—you’re always like this.”

Wei Wuxian then places the rabbits down, allowing them to around freely. The white one moved, eating the extra lettuce while the other hops around, leaving small, tiny footprint trails on Lan Wangji's paper. Lan Wangji looked down at them, puzzled, unsure of what to do next. Then, the rabbits began rolling and climbing on top of each other, fighting for dominance. Wei Wuxian became aware of this and exclaimed, “Lan Zhan, Lan Zhan!”

“What?” he inquired, the exaggerated tone on Wei Wuxian's face leading him to believe there was a problem.

“Look at how one is on top of the other,” he cheerily observed. If you have a mind like Wei Wuxian, you’d know immediately. “Are they—”

Some were shocked and disgusted, while others were amused and burst out laughing.

“If you finish that word, I swear to god,” Jiang Wanyin groaned. “I’m going to strangle you, Wei Wuxian!”

“You all are perverts! I’d have you know that I am more innocent than you think,” Wei Wuxian smirked as his gaze fell on Lan Wangji. The words behind that sentence made Lan Wangji’s ears turn red. “And I'd like to remind you, Jiang Cheng, that we've read an erotica before,” he revealed, drawing the attention of the Jiang Matriarch and Patriarch to their son.

Jin Ling wishes he never knew this, while Jiang Yanli simply shakes her head, expressing her disapproval.

“Well, I mean, that's practically normal; A-Cheng is a growing up boy,” Jiang Fengmian smiled, but he was not pleased with what Wei Wuxian revealed. Yu Ziyuan scolded her son silently through her eyes, and Jiang Wanyin lowered his head, ashamed.

“Both of these are male!” Lan Wangji exclaimed in ire.

“There’s nothing wrong with that,” Cangse Sanren blurted, winking at his son-in-law.

“Male? How weird,” Wei Wuxian lifted them by the ears, examined them, and confirmed. “They really are males. Now that I think about it, I was the one who caught them, and I didn’t even notice their gender. Where were you looking at exactly—“

“Get lost!” Lan Wangji exclaimed, attempting to stand, yet Wei Wuxian had already jumped down the window, laughing loudly as he sprinted away.

“Poor Hanguang-jun,” Zizhen cackled with delight.

“Such a menace,” Song Lan remarked, a smile on his lips.

Not everyone noticed, but Wei Wuxian was aware of his husband's flinching at his words. Leaning more closely to him, he whispered, “Lan Zhan, stop thinking about it.”

“Mn.”

Now that Wei Wuxian is away from his proximity, Lan Wangji rubbed his hands against his temples, his face flushed with color.

On the second day, Lan Wangji finally stopped having classes with them.

“Really, poor Hanguang-jun,” an amused female cultivator laughed.

“Lan Wangji finally had enough,” Madam Jin laughed. She couldn't get her mind off these two being so adorable to each other.

“It was more of Lan Wangji panicking,” Mianmian clarified, lips quirking up.

The scene changed to an open field filled with disciples kneeling in groups on the ground.

“What’s going on?” Qingheng-jun inquired.

“Oh, it’s the raising of lanterns, father,” Lan Xichen responded.

“No, that's not right; it won't hold that way.”

“Take a look at how I do it.”

“That’s not stable.”

“This is the right way.”

“First, grab this layer.”

Among the disciples were Wei Wuxian and Lan Wangji, who somehow ended up pairing each other to work on their lanterns.

“That’s right, they should be paired at all times!” Jingyi exclaimed, a satisfied expression on his face.

“They look so good together,” Zizhen remarked, dreamily sighing.

“Lan Zhan,” Wei Wuxian spoke, “since we’ve been through life and death experiences together, let’s release a sky lantern and make wishes together.”

“I’m used to doing it myself,” Lan Wangji responded immediately.

The cultivators clearly heard, *‘I’m used to being alone,’* behind Lan Wangji’s words, and some couldn’t help but pity him. Because of his cold demeanor, not everyone wants to talk to him even if they wished to, fairly intimidated. Lan Wangji does the same. He doesn't speak to others, not because he does not want to, but because he does not want them to be uncomfortable around him. After all, besides being aloof, he finds himself unpleasant to talk to.

Qingheng-jun and Madam Lan’s hearts ache with this. Their child, alone with only his uncle and older brother to talk to. It was all thanks to Wei Wuxian that their son is happy right now.

Wei Wuxian will never stop bothering his husband, even if it means he gets too much— he will never leave his husband alone again.

“You can change your habits,” Wei Wuxian said. “Plus, I made this lantern just for you; look!” He thrust the paper in front of Lan Wangji, which had a beautifully drawn rabbit on it.

It was subtle, but Lan Wangji’s eyes widened, staring at the drawing in shock. Then, astoundingly, there was a barely-there but undeniable smile on Lan Wangji's lips.

While Nie Huaisang admired the drawing, the cultivators gasped in surprise, stupefied seeing the Chief Cultivator smile. They've never seen Lan Wangji smile, but Wei Wuxian can easily elicit new emotions from him. They had to be honest; Lan Wangji was already attractive with his aloof and indifferent expression, but a subtle smile enhanced his beauty even more. Women across the cultivation world would surely swoon.

Wei Wuxian was smug, seeing how his past self made his husband happy like this. He worked hard just to get that expression on his face, and everything he did was worthwhile.

“Lan-er-gege, why do you have to be so beautiful?” he murmured, cheeks flushed red.

“Wei Ying is more beautiful,” Lan Wangji responded, and Wei Wuxian quickly hid his face behind his husband's shoulder.

“Ah, Lan Zhan, what am I gonna do with you?”

Lan Qiren was rendered speechless. How does someone so rambunctious make his nephew smile like that? Lan Wangji had grown distant and never smiled again since their mother died. He tried his hardest to make him smile, but all he got was a decisive nod each time, which he figured was better than seeing him sad. He couldn't help but feel envious, but he quickly dismissed the thought.

“Hanguang-jun is so handsome.”

“That smile, oh my god,”

“Wei Wuxian is so lucky.”

Wei Wuxian laughed as he noticed the small smile, pleased that he had elicited a reaction from the second jade. “You smiled!” he teased.

Lan Wangji’s smile dissipated and he glared at Wei Wuxian. He moved to get Bichen and Wei Wuxian immediately back away.

“Wait, I’m sorry!”

Lan Xichen and Lan Qiren appeared moments later, watching the disciples finally release the lanterns. They all stood there watching as the lanterns soared higher and higher, brightening the night sky, each with a different drawing on it.

The temple was strangely quiet as they watched the lanterns with smiles on their faces.

“So pretty!”

“We didn't have an event like that, did we?”

“No, we did not.”

“Perhaps they decided to stop it.”

Lan Wangji looked up at the sky for a moment, not noticing Wei Wuxian's gaze on him, before returning to the lantern. The majority of the disciples began clasping their hands and closing their eyes, making silent prayers and wishes.

“I wish to successfully complete my education and not come back next year,” Nie Huaisang wished.

Nie Mingjue turns to his younger brother, giving him an unamused look. He just gave an anxious laugh while Jiang Wanyin and Jin Zixuan snorted.

“I wish that I can protect the weak and little with a good conscience and live with no regrets,” Wei Wuxian murmured, and beside him, Lan Wangji blinked, turning to him in surprise.

And Wei Wuxian truly fulfilled his wish, even if it tarnished his reputation and alienated him from the cultivation world. Words cannot express how grateful Wen Qing was for what Wei Wuxian had done. He sacrificed so much to save her family, yet she did so little in return. She wanted to be there when Wei Wuxian finally cleared his name because she knew that, aside from the guilt in her heart, the weight on her shoulders would be lifted in some way.

'Thank you, Wei Wuxian,' Wen Qing thought, glancing at the said man.

"And yet he failed. Were those words merely for show?" an unknown cultivator inquired, grinning like a madman, and some agreed with him, disappointed that Wei Wuxian did not fulfill his wish.

"No!" Lan Wangji snapped, glaring at the man fiercely. "He protected the weak than most of you could," he seethes, his hands clenched tightly on the hilt of his sword.

"And those words were not for show," Mianmian insisted, adding, "Wei Wuxian is one of the most righteous people I know."

"Righteous? He protected the Wen-dogs!" Another one pipes in. "They were prisoners. They did not deserve to be protected!"

Wen Qing, Wen Ning, and Sizhui flinched at his words, their gaze lowering to the ground.

"They were all sick elderly people!" exclaimed Wei Wuxian, struggling to keep his emotions in check. He simply cannot stand the insulting of the family who accepted him, and he certainly cannot stand watching Wen Qing, Wen Ning, and Sizhui wilt in their places. "And there was a child! A literal child on the Jin's prison camp! I had to save and protect them!"

Cangse Sanren and Wei Changze were horrified. Sick elderly people and a child? In the prison camp?!

"Why must you save them?!" Yu Ziyuan exclaimed. "They are Wens, Wei Wuxian!"

“They did nothing wrong!” Wei Wuxian protested, frustration and anger taking over him. “Wen Qing's family is Dafan Wens, not Qishan Wens! Their family is more concerned with medicine and healing than with killing!”

“They’re still Wen—”

“Shut up!” Wei Wuxian interrupted. Why must they stain Wen Qing's family—his family when they did nothing wrong? When they're only victims forced to follow Wen Rouhan's orders? They knew nothing, and they had no right to insult them in such a way.

“Xian-gege,” Sizhui called, touching his hand that has been gripping his flute. Wei Wuxian turns to him and slowly calms down. “That’s enough, don’t be angry,” he smiled, and it angered Wei Wuxian more because that was not a genuine smile, that smile was mixed with hurt and shame, but because he requested, he forced himself to calm down.

“The truth will be shown on the screen soon,” Jiang Yanli interjected, the smile on her lips faded. “I hope none of you ever regret your words because if you do, I want you to all apologize to my Brother.”

The men looked at Jiang Yanli incredulously, not expecting her to speak harshly given her kind and gentle nature.

“Shijie—”

“Behave, A-Xian.”

Jin Ling and Jin Zixuan shuddered while Jiang Wanyin was pleased with her sister’s words.

Lan Wangji continued staring at Wei Wuxian, and if you look more closely, you could see a small wave of fondness on his face.

Lan Xichen smiled. His brother really fell in love, unknowingly, with the boy he barely knew. It was just sad that a lot of things happened in the past. Would things be different if his brother chose to confess before the war?

Beside Lan Xichen, Wei Wuxian was gaping slightly. How could he have missed his husband staring at him in the past? The way he looked at him felt as if he were the most beautiful thing that had ever happened to Lan Wangji as if he were the star in his dark, lonely sky. Wei Wuxian's cheeks turned red.

The scene blurred out, and they were now inside the Orchid Room with Lan Qiren's voice reading aloud, "The founder of Lan Clan, An, came from the temple and was raised by the Sanskrit. He was intelligent and enlightened, devoted to study with an outstanding aptitude. When his Dharma, the teaching of the Buddha, was expounded, all the illustrious ones gathered."

"Are we one class or something?" Jin Ling grumbled, not daring to look at Lan Qiren, knowing the old man was secretly glaring at him.

"At the very least, we'll learn something," Jiang Yanli said optimistically.

"He transcended all through Chan, aka Zen, a school of Buddhism with spiritual and meditative practices, thus renowned far and wide," Lan Qiren continued, his back to his students and his gaze fixed on the carved images in front of him. "When he came of age at 20, he secularized with the surname Lan from QieLan*, and lived as a musician."

(Qie means 'monks', Lan means 'garden')

"He's fluent in music, skilled in guqin, and flute, seeking the path of cultivation and journeying through the physical realm. When he traversed through Gusu, he met the fated love of his life and they became cultivation partners. They went through thick and thin together, laying the foundation for Lan Clan. When his lover perished, he returned to the temples for the rest of his life. These four paintings depict the Lan Clan's founder, Lan An's four scenes of his life," Lan Qiren concludes, turning to face his students while touching his goatee.

Jin Zixuan, Jiang Wanyin, Nie Huaisang, Wei Wuxian, and Lan Wangji felt nostalgic about seeing the scene before them. They suddenly felt like students again while listening to Lan Qiren's boring lectures. This was also the time when everything was peaceful and there were few problems, with the exception of the issues between the Wens.

Realization dawned upon Jin Zixuan, his face gaining a pale complexion. "Shit," he cursed, and Jin Ling and Jiang Yanli looked at him, perplexed by the sudden cursing.

"What's the matter?" Madam Jin asked, slightly concerned for her son.

"I hate this," he murmured as he turned to face his wife. "I apologize in advance, A-Li. I was really an ass in the past. Please know that I love you very much," he admitted, and Jin Ling and Jiang Yanli immediately understood.

Jiang Wanyin went still beside Jiang Yanli, remembering what happened next in this scene.

Wei Wuxian walks up to Jiang Wanyin's side. "Oh," he says quietly, "so the Lan Clan's founder was a monk; no wonder his descendants have so many rules and are clueless about romanticism."

Knowing the Lans' claim that they only love once, which was apparently a curse for them, he found himself in front of his husband and his husband's father, saying, "I'm sorry."

"No, that's alright, Wei-gongzi," Qingheng-jun reassured. "That's your opinion."

Beside Lan Xichen, Lan Qiren's frown deepened, but Lan Wangji seemed unconcerned by what he said. His husband simply shakes his head and pulled Wei Wuxian closer.

"Lan Zhan, you're very romantic, you know that right?"

“Hmm.”

“Lan An was like a deity among mortals,” a Jin disciple informed, and Wei Wuxian turned in his direction. “I wonder how ethereal his lover must be.”

“The current cultivation clans have no lack of exquisite fair ladies either,” another Jin disciple observed, turning to face the Jin Heir, who was standing nearby. “Zixuan-xiong, who do you think is the fairest?” he inquired, eager to know if their heir is fancying someone.

Wei Wuxian froze while Jin Zixuan curled his hands into fists, wishing he could silence his past self, but he couldn't, and his wife and son are now forced to watch him insult Jiang Yanli.

“A-Li—”

“A-Xuan, it’s fine,” Yanli reassured, eyes full of understanding, yet he was not fooled, there was a slight disappointment in her eyes.

Jin Zixuan made no indication to respond and scoffed before walking away.

Jin Ling stared, his face morphing into disappointment. Jiang Yanli pressed her lips together, her sweet smile gone from her lovely face, just as Jin Zixuan had predicted. The look of pain on her face made him want to punch himself. Jiang Fengmian and Yu Ziyuan frowned, glaring at the Jin Heir in displeasure. Yu Ziyuan wanted to teach him a lesson again, but the Jin Heir had already apologized and promised to be a better man for their daughter now.

“I’m so disappointed with you, Zixuan,” Madam Jin chastised, shaking her head in shame.

“I'm disappointed in myself as well, Mother.”

“Leave him out of that question,” the Jin disciple reminded. “He already has a fiancé. His answer would obviously be her.”

Jin Zixuan’s momentarily frowned, as if the reminder that he’s already engaged brought him nothing but displeasure.

Jin Zixuan is desperate to bury himself alive right now. His wife smiled, a forced and sad smile that did not fit his wife's lovely features. Just why was he such a jerk before? He did not even try to seek out Yanli and get to know her before passing judgment on her. He bet if he tried, he'd gradually fall in love with her. He supposes his annoyance and anger at the arranged marriage were understandable. After growing up in the same household as his toxic parents. But really, Jiang Yanli did not deserve such harsh words and dismissal from him.

“Really?” inquired the other Jin disciple. “Which fair lady would that be?”

Jiang Yanli shuffled to her seat, suddenly feeling uncomfortable.

Jiang Wanyin became aware of this and took her sister's hand in his.

Jin Zixuan slammed his hand into the door and ordered, “Forget it.”

“What do you mean *‘forget it’*?” Wei Wuxian interjected, his arms crossed. Jiang Wanyin doing the same thing to his side. Jin Zixuan turned toward him with a scornful glare.

This should come as no surprise to them. Wei Wuxian was devoted to his sister. But usually, Wei Wuxian was always grinning, he had never really been angered, even when reprimanded or punished. Yet, at the moment, everyone could see the obvious streak of hostility on his face. Jiang Wanyin, on the other hand, did nothing to stop his brother, who is usually there to chastise him for his actions, yet he feels the same sentiment as his brother. There was an undeniable dark look on his face.

Despite being a troublemaker, Wei Wuxian's overprotectiveness of his sister never fails to make Jiang Yanli smile, but the scene in front of her is concerning. This was the time her brother punched her husband and was sent home.

"Senior Wei is sometimes scary," Zizhen remarked, slightly shuddering.

"You'd be even more afraid of him later on. Trust me," Nie Huaisang said, and this made the disciples shudder even more. Were they even prepared to witness the birth of the Yiling Patriarch?

"**Is the phrase 'forget it' too difficult to understand?" Jin Zixuan said, his tone full of arrogance.**

"The phrase isn't hard to understand," Wei Wuxian responded sardonically. "Instead, it's hard to understand how on earth you are unsatisfied with my Shijie."

Yu Ziyuan, for once, agreed with him, and as Yunmeng Jiang's Head Disciple, it is only natural for him to defend his senior sister. Although she had an insight into Jin Zixuan's reluctance to marry, she couldn't understand why this Jin Zixuan on the screen had to be so arrogant when he could have explained politely. Her daughter's appearance is above average, and even if her talents weren't astonishing either, she excels in cooking and helping others, and she's kind and unique. She was the daughter of a Sect Leader, which is a significant advantage in marriage. She is proud to have her as a daughter, but Jin Zixuan's implication that she is cheap and undesirable was offensive.

"Huh?" the Jin disciple murmured to his friend, oblivious to the Jin heir's hand curling into a fist. "So it's that mediocre Jiang Yanli? No wonder Zixuan-xiong—"

"Their mothers are friends so.."

"Shut up!" Jin Ling exclaimed, glaring at the Jin disciples. "Mother is not mediocre!"

“A-Ling,” Jiang Yanli smiled. “It’s okay.”

“It’s not!” Jin Ling, Jiang Wanyin, and Wei Wuxian chorused.

In some ways, the cultivators were uneasy. This scene in front of them felt like something they shouldn't see or know about. No one knew what happened between the couple or how the arranged marriage was revoked, but it was now out in the open for them to express their opinions, which made them even more uncomfortable.

Scoffing arrogantly, Jin Zixuan countered, “Why don’t you ask me how on earth can I be satisfied with her?!”

Lan Qiren, Nie Mingjue, and Lan Xichen shake their heads, upset with Jin Zixuan’s display of arrogance.

“A-Die..” Jin Ling murmured, even more disappointed, but he couldn't afford to be angry at his own father. Jin Zixuan tightly gripped his son's hand.

“I’m just happy you learned, but I am still disappointed, A-Xuan,” Madam Jin chastised, frowning. “A-Li never deserved your harsh words. Ever.”

Jin Zixuan sighs. “I know,” he said, turning to face his wife. “I’m sorry, A-Li.”

“It does not matter,” Yanli reassured once again. “It’s all in the past.”

Angered, Jiang Wanyin stepped forward to attack. “You—!”

But Wei Wuxian pushed him back, not wanting his brother to get into trouble. He then walked forward and came to a halt in front of the Jin heir, fists clenched tightly, accompanied by a dark look.

“You sure you think you’re pretty satisfying, don’t you?” Wei Wuxian sneered. “Where did you get the guts to be all choosy here?”

“Yeah, Jiang Yanli is good,” a young man remarked.

“And she’s very pretty and kind. Why are his standards so high?”

“Well, he comes from a wealthy family.”

“Didn't he explain why he didn't agree to the marriage?”

“Well yes, but what he did was still wrong, look at her, she’s not okay.”

The disciples turned to look at Jiang Yanli, who was staring at the screen with unfiltered hurt on her face.

“Rumors did say A-Ling’s father was arrogant,” Sizhui reminded. “I was not expecting it to be this bad.”

“He was already arrogant the first we see him on the screen,” Jingyi stated flatly.

“Okay, stop now; someone will hear you,” Zizhen warned.

Raising his chin, Jin Zixuan pressed, “If she’s unsatisfied, then tell her to get rid of this engagement! In conclusion, I don’t care for her, ask her father about it! Doesn’t he treat you better than treating his own son or something!”

At the reminder, Yu Ziyuan’s frown deepened. If she had Zidian right now, it would’ve sparked to life. On the side, Cangse Sanren and Wei Changze scowled slightly, not liking the way Jin Zixuan mentioned their son’s involvement with the Jiang Patriarch. Jiang Fengmian, on the other hand, appeared torn between being angry for his daughter and worried that his wife would be angry again.

Jiang Yanli did not manage to hold back the flinch. Hearing those words coming from her husband feels like she is being stabbed once again but this is all in the past. It didn't matter, but it still hurt her so much. Jiang Wanyin and Wei Wuxian glared at the Jin Heir. Jin Ling moved away from his father a bit to get closer to his mother.

Jin Zixuan looked even more pained, seeing his son avoid him. This hurt more than Wen Ning's hand piercing his heart.

Meanwhile, several cultivators began to suspect that Jin Zixuan's scorn for Jiang Yanli in his youth and their marriage was the beginning of Wei Wuxian's vendetta against him, resulting in his death in the future, but at the same time, this does not appear to be the case. There’s still something they did not know.

Wen Ning, beside Wen Qing, looks guiltily at the Jin heir, his eyes mournful.

Hearing the last sentence, Jiang Wanyin’s eyes stiffened. With uncontrollable anger, Wei Wuxian rushed over and sent out a punch.

“Ouch, that must’ve hurt,” Xiao Xingchen mumbled.

“He deserved it for being rude,” Song Lan stated categorically.

Wei Wuxian and Jiang Wanyin both felt sorry for the Jin heir and were pleased with the outcome.

Although prepared, Jin Zixuan didn’t expect Wei Wuxian to attack so quickly. Having suffered one punch, half of his face numbed. He did not waste any time and immediately struck back without speaking a word.

“They started brawling! Brawling!”

“Impudent!” Lan Qiren’s voice boomed. “The Cloud Recesses is no place for brawling!”

The screen then darkened, transporting them to various locations in the Cloud Recesses, giving them more time to process what had happened.

“This is why we didn't want you to see the memories, A-Ling,” Jiang Wanyin said, concerned for his nephew.

“It’s okay,” Jin Ling mumbled, his voice muffled by her mother's shoulder. “I am upset, but I am not mad. I still want to see.”

That made Jin Zixuan feel a little better, but it doesn't mean he's completely fine. Madam Jin places her hand on her son's shoulders, gripping them lightly.

“A-Li, I am really sorry,” he apologized, lowering his head, and promised to keep doing so until his wife felt better.

“A-Xuan, I told you, it’s okay.”

“It’s not,” he insisted. He takes her hand in his and grips it tightly. “For someone as arrogant as I am, you should not easily forgive me. I did a lot of mistakes, and it will really make me better if you get angry at me, or you could slap me. I’ll accept—”

“I won’t slap you,” Jiang Yanli interrupted, slightly frowning. “Alright, I admit it, I am upset, and it hurts me, but I will always forgive you because I adore you and you are my husband.”

Jin Zixuan felt like crying. His wife is truly amazing. Someone like her is not something he deserves. Why had it taken him so long to realize how good she was?

“You are so good,” he murmured, his voice husky.

“I am not,” Jiang Yanli replied, chuckling.

The exchange relieved the cultivators, particularly Madam Jin, Madam Yu, and Jin Ling. Jin Zixuan may not be the best man or father, but he is improving and will continue to do so.

“Why did they even try to pair the two if the other is—”

“Do not finish that sentence,” Nie Mingjue warned sharply, glaring at the man.

“They’re married and they have a son; why make more comments?” Jiang Fengmian inquired calmly, but the cultivators were not fooled by his calm; he had a vexed look on his face that conveyed that if he doesn't stop, he will be less forgiving. The man simply grumbled and said nothing else.

Outside the ancestral hall, Wei Wuxian had kneeled on the ground, stabbing the ant nest before him. Footsteps echoed lightly, and in the hallway was Lan Wangji. He came to a halt and glanced at the back of Wei Wuxian, whose shoulders were slumped as if he deeply regretted what had happened.

Jin Zixuan had never felt guiltier than at the moment.

Then, the screen suddenly flashed as if they entered another memory, yet it was still the same setting, with Wei Wuxian and Lan Wangji in the ancestral hall, but this time,

there was Lan Qiren beside Wei Wuxian.

“You’re really unruly and ignorant,” Lan Qiren reprimanded as he began pacing, unaware that his nephew had already hidden behind the pillar. “Kneel here and wait for Clan Leader Jiang to come,” he ordered, then, with a final scoff, he left.

“Wei Ying!” he whispered as he emerged from the pillar. He may look indifferent, but there was a slight furrow on his brow. His concern for Wei Wuxian's well-being was palpable.

Many people smiled but were perplexed as to why Lan Wangji had suddenly acted this way. Was Wei Wuxian’s punishment more severe?

“Aw, Hanguang-jun’s worried!” Wei Wuxian cooed as well as the others, but Lan Wangji was unbelievably stiff.

“Lan Zhan? What’s wrong?”

If Lan Wangji weren’t a prude man, he would’ve said *‘Fuck’* already.

The screen changed to show Wei Wuxian's face, with large, fat tears streaming down his cheeks.

The cultivators were stunned, especially Wei Wuxian and Jiang Wanyin.

The cultivators chorused, “What the hell?”

“Why are you crying?!” Jiang Wanyin exclaimed, turning to face his brother who was equally perplexed as him.

“I don’t know!” Wei Wuxian responded, feeling the same sentiment as his brother. “I have no recollection of this happening!”

“Your memory is so terrible,” Jin Ling commented, still in disbelief seeing his uncle crying.

Wei Wuxian’s sobs rang out as he whined, “I was not only punished for fighting someone but also got Uncle Jiang in trouble!”

This entire image appeared above Lan Wangji, linked to his head, telling us what he was thinking.

The immovable, revered Hanguang-jun’s imagination....His imagination has been revealed to everyone. Wei Wuxian smirked and turned to face his husband, whose ears were redder than usual.

“Lan Zhan~~”

“Please stop speaking, Wei Ying.”

“Oh my god,” Jiang Wanyin groaned, face-palming.

“I never expected to see Hanguang-jun's thoughts like this,” Zizhen remarked, delighted,

“That’s so adorable,” Jiang Yanli and Nie Huaisang squealed.

Wei Wuxian slammed his hands on the ground as if he couldn't kneel upright any longer. This caught Lan Wangji’s attention, and this time, his imagination showed Wei Wuxian clutching his stomach in pain, blood running down the corner of his mouth.

“Jin Peacock, how could you use your spiritual power?” Wei Wuxian hissed, sweat running down his forehead.

Once more, they were brought out of Lan Wangji’s thoughts. His expression remained indifferent, with no sign of concern until memory decided to reveal it.

God, Lan Wangji had never felt more embarrassed than he does now. Why did the immortal decide to include this?

“Wei-xiong, if Hanguang-jun is capable of imagining this, do you think he also thought of you—”

“If you dare to finish that sentence, I am smacking your head, Huaisang,” Nie Mingjue warned and the latter immediately shut up. Wei Wuxian just laughed.

Jin Zixuan turned to Lan Wangji, in disbelief that had thought such a thing. Even though he was angry with Wei Wuxian at the time, he would not attack him using spiritual energy.

Lan Xichen simply laughed, amused by his brother’s embarrassment and imagination, which, according to Lan Wangji, is so cruel.

Wei Wuxian sagged even more, his arms now unable to support him. Lan Wangji gasped in alarm and dashed over to the kneeling Wei Wuxian.

“Wei Ying,” he called out, his hand hesitantly reaching for Wei Wuxian.

Madam Lan and Qingheng-jun cooed, staring fondly at their son. It was already endearing that their son is concerned about Wei Wuxian and how his imagination works. Though they wish *'some'* of their son's imaginations would remain in his mind.

“Hm?” A perfectly-fine Wei Wuxian turned around to face whoever called him. “Lan Zhan, we haven’t seen each other in ages! What are you doing here?” he asked. He stared at the second jade for a moment before his face brightened. “Were you punished too? You know what? I found an ant nest. Let me teach you how to play it!”

The screen pans down to reveal an ant nest that Wei Wuxian has just stabbed with a stick.

The cultivators burst out laughing, with the disciples being the loudest. Even those who were bored were amused, lips tilting up in a smile.

Meanwhile, for 35 years, this has been the most embarrassing day for Lan Wangji. His imagination being revealed was embarrassing enough, but his concern for the boy and seeing that his concern was futile from the start was even more so. He even remembered how irritated he was at the time for expressing concern. At this point, how was he supposed to defend his thoughts?

“Lan-er-gege, no need to be embarrassed,” Wei Wuxian smiled, his eyes crinkling like the crescent moon. “You are so cute.”

“I am not,” he immediately protested. He’s not going to be shocked if the blush from his ears had spread down to his cheeks. He can feel his uncle chastising him for even imagining such a thing.

“You are, Wangji,” Lan Xichen, Qingheng-jun, and Madam Lan chorused, and he found himself unable to respond.

Lan Wangji’s eyebrow twitched with rage. Wei Wuxian returned his attention to the ant nest, ignoring the second jade's anger.

“First, out a bait in it,” Wei Wuxian instructed.

Lan Wangji's previous imagination of Wei Wuxian crying appeared to a bubble to his side, pierced through his heart.

"H-Hanguang-jun!" the disciples called, unable to stop their laughter since no one tried to shut them up, not even Lan Qiren, who appeared more annoyed than usual.

Wei Wuxian giggled, fondness washed over him.

"And then, get a twig."

Another thought bubble appeared, this time showing Wei Wuxian clutching his stomach in pain, blood running down to the corner of his mouth, pierced through his heart.

"Finally, stab the nest!"

"He's stupid," A-Qing blurted. "How is he the Yiling Patriarch?"

"I agree," Jingyi concurs, wiping the tears away from his eyes.

"He's not stupid," Sizhui defended. "He's just…..fun?"

"Is that another polite way of saying *'weird'*, Sizhui?" Jin Ling asked, brows wiggling.

"All right, stop talking now. Remember, we are not the only people here," Zizhen reminded, returning his gaze to the screen.

The last thought bubble that appeared above Lan Wangji also stabbed through his heart.

“And this is who you called *‘the cold and aloof, Hanguang-jun’*?” Cangse Sanren inquired, sending a mischievous wink to Lan Wangji. “For a big man, you are indeed cute, Lan Wangji.”

“See? Even my mother agrees!”

Lan Wangji just wished they stop calling him *‘cute’*.

Wei Wuxian laughed and said, “Isn’t this fun? Lan Zhan, give it a try.”

“How is an ant’s nest a plaything for you, Wei Wuxian?” Jiang Wanyin inquired, both fondly and exasperatedly. “Last time you also played with a fucking worm.”

“Hey, worm fights are fun too, you know,” Wei Wuxian countered. “We used to play that a lot; do you remember when you—”

“I dare you to finish that sentence Wei Wuxian.”

“—tried to catch the worm and you—”

“Shut up!”

Jin Ling was desperate for Wei Wuxian to finish the story.

Wei Wuxian offered Lan Wangji his twig, but the latter let out a heavy sigh and walked away.

“Eh? Why did you go away? It was really fun!..... Are you sure you don’t wanna stab it?”

“Only you would stab it,” Wei Changze said, laughing lightly.

“You would indulge me, right Father?” he asked, eyes staring expectantly at his father. “You’d stab an ant’s nest if I ask, right?”

Wei Changze chose not to respond, instead simply smiling, eliciting a whine from his son.

Sad, he returned his gaze to the ant's nest. “What a shame. You haven’t seen my masterpiece yet.”

“What masterpiece? You literally stabbed an ant’s home,” Mianmian said, rolling her eyes, but there was a smile on her lips.

“There are various types of masterpieces, one of which—”

“We don’t need to know that,” Jiang Wanyin interrupted, earning a pout from Wei Wuxian.

Now that Lan Wangji was out of sight, Jiang Wanyin appeared, walking towards his kneeling brother.

“You irritated him again, didn't you?” he calmly asked, looking down at his brother.

Instead of answering, Wei Wuxian laughed and asked, “Anyway, where’s that idiot Jin Zixuan?”

Jin Zixuan flinched at the mention of his name and being called an idiot. Based on what had happened previously, he assumed he was.

“I heard that he really cares about his face. I wonder how he felt after looking in the mirror,” he said, lightly slapping his cheek as if he wasn't attractive himself.

Madam Jin wholeheartedly agrees with Wei Wuxian. His son is arrogant and proud, particularly of his appearance, and while she is also proud to have a good-looking son, a bruise on the face may not be so bad. In any case, he deserved it.

“It’s a shame you didn’t hit him,” Wei Wuxian smirked.

“I was going to. If you did not push me, the other side of Jin Zixuan’s face would be ruined.”

Jin Zixuan dared not imagine what his face would look like if he was punched by the Jiang brothers, but he already pictured a large bruise on either side of his cheeks. He cast a glance at Jiang Wanyin, who raised an eyebrow as if asking if he had a problem with him before returning his attention to the screen.

“Nah, he's even uglier now, with his asymmetrical face.”

“Damn, poor Jin-gongzi,” a Jin disciple murmured, face cringing.

Hearing voices nearby, Wei Wuxian turned and saw the Sect Leader, Jiang, talking to Jin Guangshan. “Uncle Jiang is here.”

“A-Li’s Mother was the one who insisted on having this engagement in the first place,” Jiang Fengmian said after he pondered what Jin Guangshan had said. “Looking at it now, as neither of them are keen, it’s best if we don’t force it.”

Yu Ziyuan scoffed. “Who told you to make that decision yourselves?”

“Looking at the previous scenes, you'll understand why I don't want to force the engagement, San-niang,” Jiang Fengmian explained softly, maintaining eye contact.

“You lied, Fengmian,” she said, her face darkening slightly. “You only said get Wei Wuxian, not meet with Jin Guangshan and revoke the engagement without my permission!”

“Think rationally, San-niang. Are you really going to force A-Li into a loveless marriage?” Jiang Fengmian asked, trying to make his wife understand his point. Jiang Yanli and Jin Zixuan both avoided making eye contact. “Just because you and Madam Jin promised each other that our children would marry each other doesn't mean it guarantees a happy marriage.”

“The engagement may have been for the sake of the alliance, but I want our daughter and Jin-gongzi to love each other as well,” he added. If his wife is going to argue with him right now, he will not back down.

And he was correct. Not every arranged marriage ends in happiness. It will result in a loveless, toxic, or abusive marriage, which both Madams understand because they have experienced it themselves.

“Yes,” Madam Jin responded after a brief pause. “However, they are now together, and they have Jin Ling. That’s all that matters,” she said, smiling fondly at her grandson, who also smiled at her. She and her grandson still did not have the chance to talk. Perhaps he was either shy or afraid; she will have to talk to him later.

Yu Ziyuan understood their point and reluctantly nodded, knowing that arguing about the revoked engagement would be futile now. She and Madam Jin’s children are in love and happy.

Jiang Yanli and Jiang Wanyin looked at their parents in shock. No further fighting? No shouts or anything? Why isn't their mother arguing with their father like she usually does? Is their relationship really getting better?

Jin Guangshan was taken aback. He was a little hesitant, because ending an engagement with another prominent sect was never a good thing, no matter how you looked at it. He then responded, “What do the children know? They can play around however they want to. Jiang-xiong, you and I do not need to pay them any attention.”

“What does that supposed to mean?!” Madam Jin hissed. What right does he have to say that? Marriages are important in everyone's lives, and Jin Guangshan was a womanizer whose many extramarital affairs each reached the point of obscenity, so it's understandable that he wouldn't understand their significance. She tried talking to him several times, but everything she said just slipped through his mind. Honestly, she just gave up on him.

“For someone like him, he will never understand a person’s feelings,” Mianmian murmured, frowning at her previous Sect Leader.

“Jin-xiong, although we can set the engagement for them, we can’t carry out the marriage in place for them,” Jiang Fengmian contended. “After all, they will be spending the rest of their lives with each other.”

Jin Guangshan remained silent for a moment, most likely thinking about it. Then, conjuring up his courage, he said, “Jiang-xiong, if you think so, then we might as well revoke it.”

Honestly, Jiang Yanli and Jin Zixuan are relieved that their relationship worked out.

Jin Ling narrowed his eyes, hoping to catch a glimpse of his grandfather's face, but all he could see was his grandfather's silhouette form. Perhaps he will see him later.

“Is Shijie here as well?” Wei Wuxian asked.

“Why would A-Jie come? Just to witness your disgrace?” he asked, returning his gaze to his kneeling brother.

Jiang Yanli promptly gave her brother a sharp look, and he whispered an apology.

Clicking his tongue, he avoided eye contact with Jiang Wanyin. Noticing his brother frowning, he calmly reminded him, “Don’t be so brash next time.”

Following the discussion, Jiang Fengmian approached the two siblings and came to a halt in front of the kneeling Wei Wuxian, the Jiang bell swaying slightly on his waist.

“A-Xian,” he called out softly. “Get up, we’re going home.”

Despite the fact that he had been the factor in his sister's engagement being revoked and had been punished for punching a sect heir, there was never an ounce of anger or irritation on Jiang Fengmian’s face. Instead, he looked down at him with kind eyes and a smile that reminded him of the day he saved him from the wolves.

Jiang Fengmian smiled. Despite his poor memory, Wei Wuxian had not forgotten the time he had saved him. It warmed his heart in some way. Yu Ziyuan noticed the smile and tried not to comment, but she still felt bitter.

Jiang Wanyin stared at the two, his face gained a look of hurt and disappointment. His father had never hurried to another sect in one day for anything related to him, whether the issue was good or bad, large or small. Never. His brother, however, no matter how large or small the trouble he initiated or was involved in, his father will do anything to come and see him immediately.

The cultivators felt sorry for him. That’s jealousy and dejection right there. This must be one of the reasons he is always angry with him, expressing his hatred for the Yiling Patriarch to people after he died.

Jiang Fengmian and Wei Wuxian turned their heads to Jiang Wanyin, who had already lowered his head in shame and hurt. Yu Ziyuan wanted to retort, *‘See what I told you? Your son had always desired your attention and support!’* but voicing this wouldn’t make the

situation better. Jiang Fengmian hesitantly took a step forward, wanting to talk with his son, but Jiang Wanyin flinched and backed away.

Yu Ziyuan's jaw clenched. This was precisely what she was referring to; now his son was terrified of expressing his true feelings and confronting his father about it. Jin Ling looked at his uncle, concerned for him. He'd never seen his uncle flinch so hard before.

“I think you misunderstood something,” Nie Huaisang said, drawing several eyes to him, eager to hear what he had to say.

“What is there to misunderstand, Nie-gongzi?” Yu Ziyuan asked, trying not to sound harsh.

Wei Wuxian threw his friend a look of warning, as if threatening him that if he said something, he'd kill him in his sleep, but he decided he didn't care about his friend's rage. He'd dealt with far scarier things in the past. He’s certain he and Wei Wuxian had the same speculation.

“Jiang-zongzhu cares less of Wei Wuxian than his own son,” he blurted out, eliciting a surprised and confused look from the cultivators.

“How can you say that?” Nie Mingjue wondered, equally confused as the others.

“I'll explain later; for now, I have little evidence to present, but I assure you, what I said is true,” he said, his gaze shifting to Wei Wuxian, his face hidden behind his fan. “Right, Wei-xiong?” he asked, and the cultivators turned to look at him.

Wei Wuxian did not respond, but he had a hard look on his face. Jiang Wanyin desperately wanted to believe Nie Huaisang, but it felt disgusting to wish for such a thing.

“Then, what if you’re wrong, Nie-gongzi?” Yu Ziyuan asked, raising a brow and Nie Huaisang felt intimidated. Well, Yu Ziyuan has always been intimidating, but he stood his ground, staring straight into her eyes.

“Then I will apologize for speculating,” he said, and Yu Ziyuan scoffed as she stared at him from head to toe as if trying to remember every molecule of his existence.

“Alright then.”

The cultivators shuddered. Knowing Nie Huaisang's intelligence, his speculations could be true or false.

Shortly after Wei Wuxian had left, Lan Wangji returned to the ancestral hall, walking towards the ant nest Wei Wuxian had stabbed. He stared at it, raising a brow in confusion, pondering whether to leave the ant nest alone or do something about it, but it appears that curiosity got the better of him.

Grabbing a twig from the ground, Lan Wangji slowly poked the nest, prompting the ants to emerge from the ground.

Wei Wuxian, Lan Wangji’s parents, and Lan Xichen grinned and cooed at the scene, while Lan Wangji’s ears turned bright red.

“Ah, Hanguang-jun is really cute!”

“Hanguang-jun was really baited, huh.”

“Again, you are so cute, Lan-er-gege~”

“Wei Ying, please stop.”

Wei Wuxian laughed anyway. Lan Qiren, however, was a bit conflicted. Wei Wuxian didn't last long in the Cloud Recesses, but it was easy for him to bring out his nephew's suppressed

emotions. While it made it easier for them to read his nephew in this manner, it did not make him happy. It was strange to see his nephew's new emotions, but it was also pleasing. Just why did Wei Wuxian, of all people, have to be the one to change him?

Lan Wangji had to take a step back from the nest as the ants scattered, uncertain what to do next. He remembered Wei Wuxian saying that playing with ants was *'fun'*, yet he felt rather the opposite of it.

His expression immediately changed to an irritated scowl.

“That’s why you never listen to Wei Wuxian’s words,” Jiang Wanyin grumbled, exasperatedly sighing and rolling his eyes.

“Hey!”

The ants that had scattered formed themselves, recreating Wei Wuxian’s wolf-and-chicken drawing which was a wordplay of the second jade’s name.

Feeling more irritated that he had been baited, he clenched the side of his robes, ears burning in humiliation.

“You cheeky brat!”

The cultivators laughed heartily. It was clear that the second jade's reputation as cold and aloof was now changing. The wall he built to keep cultivators away from him was crumbling, and now many want to get close to him, to get to know him better, but knowing his husband was the Yiling Patriarch, they will have to be cautious as well.

“I want to see Hanguang-jun like this always,” Zizhen said, feeling blessed after being fed with the second jade’s cuteness.

“Then you'd have to see him around rabbits; he's very gentle with them,” Sizhui informed, widening his smile. He'd seen him caring for rabbits and being gentle with them. It is at that moment that he gets to see him being so soft and frequently smiling.

“I’ll ask father to attend Gusu lectures then,” Zizhen told his friend firmly. “You think Hanguang-jun will let us see his rabbits?”

“We take care of them occasionally,” Jingyi revealed casually, “so Hanguang-jun will let us.”

“Duh, you can ask Wei Wuxian, you know?” Jin Ling interjected.

“Huh,” the three exchanged glances, looking very stupid. “Right.”

Instantaneously, the scene drifts just above the water of Lotus Pier, and the towering walls and buildings come into existence, providing a breathtaking view of Yunmeng's Lotus Pier. The town folks and cultivators chattering and gathering around, purchasing goods made the whole place more vibrant.

The Jiangs gazed proudly at their residence. Because of the vibrant environment, Yunmeng was one of the most visited sects by people and cultivators, and they were closest to the common people, treating them very well.

Wei Wuxian grew sad. Memories, both good and bad, flooded his mind, and it didn't help that Jiang Yanli was smiling at him, as if the same thing had happened to her.

On the pier, a beautiful woman wearing purple robes walked towards the dock's edge, waiting for someone to arrive. Then she halted, her Jiang bell swaying on her waist. Just looking at her back, anyone could tell it was Jiang Yanli.

Yanli blushed after being described as beautiful, but Jiang Wanyin, Jin Zixuan, and Wei Wuxian wholeheartedly agreed. Jin Ling's gaze remained fixed on the screen. He was finally going to see the young version of her mother.

“Ah, Jiang-guniang, you’re here. Would you like to try today’s fresh melon?” One of the sellers asked politely.

Jiang Yanli turned around to face the man. “Thanks for your kindness,” she responded with a kind, sweet smile.

Jin Zixuan vowed to hire someone to paint or carve his wife, but he felt that no painter or sculptor could ever capture her beauty properly.

“You’re so pretty, Mother,” Jin Ling said, his eyes crinkling, and Jiang Yanli couldn't help but pinch his son's cheeks because of his adorableness.

“Such a sweet talker,” she replied, delightedly chuckling. “You’re just like A-Xian.”

A boat was approaching the pier. Then a hand excitedly waved and called out, “Shijie!!”

Hearing the familiar voice, both the seller and Jiang Yanli turned towards the voice and saw Wei Wuxian.

“A-Xian?” she wondered with a smile.

“Shijie!” he called out again, his smile never leaving his face. “I’m back!!”

The cultivators could see that Wei Wuxian adored and cared deeply for his sister. Because of this, it is difficult to believe the rumors that Wei Wuxian killed her own sister, because why would he? Jiang Yanli did not do anything to endanger or betray her brother in any way. Those present at the battle in the Nightless City may have witnessed her death, but they may have lied, distorting the truth and blaming it on him, knowing how much the cultivation world despises him.

Jin Ling curled his hand into a fist. The people responsible for his parents' deaths had already died, but he wished for the immortal to bring them back and kill them again, to make them pay for hurting his family, and most of all, Wei Wuxian.

Once the boat got closer to the dock, Wei Wuxian jumped out of the boat and dashed towards his sister, running past the sellers with a box in his hands.

Jiang Yanli laughed at his brother's excitement. "Slow down. Mind your step!" she cautioned softly.

He then paused in front of his sister and laughed delightedly. "Shijie! I miss you so much!"

"Jiang-guniang hasn't changed much," Wen Ning observed, and Wen Qing concurred. She hadn't met her before, but comparing the young and current versions, she could tell that, aside from the hairstyle, she had matured even more.

"Have you finished your one year of studying? Why are you back so soon?" she asked, amused and unsurprised that his brother got into trouble again.

"Cause I……. miss Shijie so much!"

"Liar," Nie Huaisang and Jiang Wanyin chorused.

Wei Wuxian simply stuck out his tongue at them; his ability to lie easily was exceptional, but doing so in front of someone who had known him since childhood, his lie was easily detected; for instance, Lan Wangji could easily tell if his husband was lying or attempting to conceal something from him.

Jiang Yanli laughed again. "Aren't you a sweet talker?"

“Oh, by the way,” Wei Wuxian added as he extended the box he was holding, “this is my gift for you!”

Inside the box were five exquisitely made cakes.

“For me?”

“Mn!” he hummed as he set the box down.

“Thank you, A-Xian.”

This whole scene was wholesome and cute. Now that Wei Wuxian has returned to Lotus Pier, it's only a matter of time before Yu Ziyuan appears.

“I’m glad you like it, Shijie! I’d like to have a lotus root ribs soup soon.”

“It’s being stewed.”

“And sour and spicy lotus sprout!”

“I've never understood your food preferences, Senior Wei,” Jingyi said, cringing slightly at the word *‘spicy’*. “Why do you like spicy foods so much?”

“Spice makes everything better, okay?” he argued. “What I don't get is why you dislike spicy food.”

“We like spicy food, but only mild!” Jingyi retorted. “You put too much spice in your food that it is literally—”

“Poisonous,” Jiang Wanyin concluded, his gaze fixed on the screen.

“So mean, Chengcheng,” Wei Wuxian pouted and turned to face his husband. “Lan Zhan, my food is not poisonous, right?”

“Mn.”

Lan Wangji, of course, would indulge his husband. Lan Xichen, Qingheng-jun, and Madam Lan all chuckled.

A ramp has been set down, allowing Jiang Fengmian to get off the boat. Seeing that the Sect Leader had returned, the civilians around the docks greeted him with a kind and respectful smile.

“Super spicy, please~~” Wei Wuxian requested.

Raising her hand to pinch her brother’s cheeks, she responded, “Of course. It will make you cry!”

Wen Qing was envious. She had been harsh with her brother, chastising him for his timidity and recklessness, but she adored him beneath her harsh exterior. She wished she could have been gentle with her him too, treating him the way Jiang Yanli treats her brothers, but as a member of a notorious clan, she could not, she needed to be strong.

Regardless, Wen Ning loved her, and that’s all that matters. Perhaps she'll try to be gentler with him from now on. His brother had been through enough.

The two laughed, and Jiang Yanli shifted her gaze to her approaching father and bowed

“A-Die,” she greeted respectfully.

Jiang Fengmian’s kind smile remained as he asked, “Where’s your mother?”

Jiang Yanli seemed to hesitate, but she eventually responded, “On the training field.”

The Jiang family, Jiang disciples, and Wei Wuxian, with the exception of Yu Ziyuan, seemed to tense at the mention of the training field.

“I feel like I'm not going to like what's going to happen next,” Jin Ling said quietly to his mother, fearful that her grandmother would overhear him. Jiang Yanli could only manage a stiff smile.

The scene immediately transported them to the training grounds. Under the scorching sun, several Jiang disciples began to sweat profusely, their bodies trembling as if unable to hold on any longer.

The Jiang disciples were thankful that they did not undergo training under the Violet Spider. Their current Sect Leader may be as harsh as her, but at the same time, he wasn’t. He was at least concerned about his disciple's well-being.

“Steady!” Yu Ziyuan commanded.

“Ye…. Yes…. Madam Yu!” The disciple stammered, struggling to stay upright despite the heavyweights in his hands.

Yu Ziyuan frowned at the struggling disciples. Even her son and Wei Wuxian could lift the weights with ease.

Seeing the frown, many cultivators shuddered.

A line of four disciples with heavy weights extended in front of them gritted their teeth, struggling even more.

“Such a simple Iron Hoop Formation, yet you cannot break it,” she snarled. “What about feral corpses? Let them step over you?!”

Wei Changze couldn't help but worry about the disciples. While trainings are normally intense, this feels even more intense and harsher. He wondered if their son was being trained harshly as well. Just the thought of it makes Wei Changze boil with anger. Yu Ziyuan expressed her hatred towards their son, and then his son revealed earlier that he had been abused in the past.

Cangse Sanren noticed her husband froze and looked up at him, asking, “Is everything okay?”

“Yes, of course,” he replied, glancing briefly at the Jiang Matriarch before returning to the screen.

“Train for two more hours!” she ordered, twisting and playing with the Zidian ring on her index finger. “You don't take cultivation seriously and are only concerned with playing?! As an example, consider your Da Shixiong. Even in Gusu, he couldn't stop causing trouble! Would you like to join him?!”

Wei Wuxian lowered his head. This made Cangse Sanren, Wei Changze, and Lan Wangji glare at the Jiang Matriarch. In every criticism, why does she have to drag his name as if it were easy to step on? Even Lan Qiren, who always scolded Wei Wuxian for his actions, seemed to frown at Yu Ziyuan's words as well.

The cultivators turned to look at the Jiang siblings, expecting them to agree with their mother's words, but they didn't. Instead, they appeared embarrassed and possibly agitated. This reaction made some people feel even more sorry for them. Just how severe was the abuse in the Jiang household?

“I don't like her at all.”

“Neither do I.”

“A-Niang,” Jiang Yanli’s gentle voice called out.

The Jiang Matriarch turned to face her approaching daughter and responded, “A-Li.”

Jiang Yanli saluted her mother, and the intense glare she had cast at the disciples earlier softened into a gentle smile.

Jiang Fengmian stared in awe. He rarely saw his wife smile, or perhaps she never smiled in his presence but seeing her smile warmed his heart. His wife looked beautiful.

Noticing a certain person behind his daughter's back, her glare frown returned, but this time it was deeper.

Performing a respectful and deep salute, Wei Wuxian greeted, “Yu-furen.”

Her gaze was drawn to the man standing next to the boy. She stared at him for a brief moment before she glanced away with a scoff.

Jiang Fengmian’s expression turned into somewhat penitent. “San-niang, haste does not bring success. Which level these kids can cultivate depends on their own chance.” He reasoned. “To force them like this may accomplish the very opposite.”

Lan Qiren and Song Lan agreed with the Sect Leaders' words and nodded.

Yu Ziyuan's gaze returned to the disciples, startling them and causing them to straighten up again; she then stood up and exclaimed, “It’s all because of your spoiling, they are now good for nothing!”

“Going overboard with the training won't help them either,” Wei Changze snapped back, gazing sharply at the Jiang Matriarch. This caused the cultivators to stare at him, utterly stunned that he chose to speak now.

Yu Ziyuan’s jaw clenched, glaring daggers at the man.

“It is one thing to train them hard, but overworking them is another. Instead of them improving, you’re torturing them,” he adds, holding her gaze with a new level of rage.

Cultivators were aware that the rogue cultivator's words had significance for them; they just didn't know what it was. Cangse Sanren and Wei Wuxian, on the other hand, were perplexed as to what prompted him to act this way.

“Don’t start lecturing me right now, Wei Changze,” she snarled. “I train my disciples the way I want.”

“Then, do you train my son in the same way?”

Wei Wuxian’s eyes widened in surprise and took a step forward, understanding why he's angry. “Father—”

“Wei Ying,” Wei Changze interrupted, “don’t speak.”

Yu Ziyuan and Wei Changze continued glaring at each other, and it looked like one of them was about to attack, so Jiang Fengmian stepped in between them.

“San-niang, please do not,” Jiang Fengmian whispered, his eyes drawn to his friend, who is also gazing sharply at him.

Yu Ziyuan scowled and averted her gaze.

“Especially the Head Disciple,” she adds. “Fighting and brawling! Even needs the clan leader’s intervention! It is the first time I’ve seen such a thing.”

“He was clearly defending his senior sister,” Mianmian murmured, shaking her head slightly.

Behind Jiang Fengmian, Wei Wuxian lowered his head, guilty for causing trouble and being the factor in his sister’s canceled engagement. But in his defense, Jin Zixuan certainly deserved that punch for being such a jerk.

Madam Jin unconsciously nodded her head in agreement.

Jiang Fengmian turned away from the boy and frowned. “San-niang,” he spoke as if warning her.

Curling her hand into a first, she fired back, “What? Did I say anything wrong? His mischief in the Lotus Pier is one thing, now he brings shame on us in Gusu?!”

“He had to defend his sister,” Lan Wangji snarled, gripping the hilt of his sword tightly. He couldn't stand seeing his husband in this state. Most of all, he can't stand her harsh criticism of him, especially since he has done nothing wrong.

Wei Wuxian smiled, although his smile did not reach his eyes. Softly, he spoke, “Lan Zhan, it’s alright.”

It was not, it was not okay. Lan Wangji did not relax and continued to throw glares at the Jiang Matriarch who chose to ignore him.

“He clearly knows Lanling Jin and Yunmeng Jiang have affinity and he still brawled with Jin Zixuan?!”

Jiang Fengmian’s frown deepened. Knowing his wife, it was clear that this argument was not going to lead them to anything fruitful.

Lan Xichen felt the need to massage his temples. This family really has some serious issues that must be addressed right away.

The tension between the couple thickened as the wind picked up. Jiang Yanli shifted her gaze back and forth between her parents, fearful that they would start fighting again. Seeing that Jiang Fengmian refused to meet her gaze, Yu Ziyuan’s glare deepened.

She was about to take a step forward when Jiang Yanli grabbed her hand.

“A-Niang, calm down,” she said gently. “I heard A-Cheng is doing well in Cloud Recesses. Grandmaster Lan also praised him.”

Jiang Wanyin raised a brow and turned to face his previous teacher, who was looking straight at the screen. Lan Qiren had praised him? How did he not know this? Furthermore, what did he do to earn his praise? Well, whatever it was, it made him smile slightly.

“You look handsome smiling, Jiujiu,” Jin Ling said, jolting Jiang Wanyin back to reality. His smile faded and was quickly replaced by a scowl.

“Shut it.”

Jin Ling lamented the loss.

After listening to her daughter's words, Yu Ziyuan took a deep sigh, seemingly calming down.

Jiang Yanli was not a particularly powerful cultivator, but her ability to calm the Violet Spider made her so.

"That kid finally made a good showing," Yu Ziyuan whispered.

Jiang Wanyin tried to contain a smile. He didn't hear his mother praise him in his presence, but seeing that she was, but without his presence, warmed his heart.

Meanwhile, to his left, Jin Zixuan leaned closer to his wife's ear and whispered. "Good job on calming her down."

Jiang Yanli chuckled and leaned against his shoulders.

Then, "Jinzhu, Yinzhu," Yu Ziyuan called out. "Let's go."

"Take care, A-Niang," Yanli said, saluting once more.

After Yu Ziyuan and her maids left the training grounds, Wei Wuxian slowly approached her and said, "Thanks, Shijie."

"You haven't seen those fellows for a long time," she said, returning the smile. "Go, say hello to them."

Wei Wuxian turned towards the exhausted and panting disciples, who smiled as they noticed him staring at them.

“He has been popular with kids since then?” Jingyi asked. Then he wondered if these disciples were still alive, or maybe they weren’t.

“Yes, he’s fond of them,” Nie Huaisang replied, recalling how many friends they had during Gusu lectures. Then he shifted his attention to the Lan disciple. “Aren’t you a kid as well? You’re practically one of Wei-xiong’s ducklings.”

“I am not!” Jingyi denied it, crossing his arms and avoiding eye contact. Nie Huaisang could only smile with delight.

One disciple waved and called out, “Da—” then cut himself off, his gaze hesitantly turning to the Sect Leader. Wei Wuxian turned to the Sect Leader as well, who only smiled broadly, giving silent permission.

Without hesitation, Wei Wuxian ran towards his fellow disciples and jumped, tackling them and sending them crashing to the ground.

Everyone stared fondly at the scene. Then it made them wonder if this was truly the Yiling Patriarch because the scenes so far had provided no motivation or goal for him to switch cultivation. In the previous and current scenes, he simply appeared to be a troublemaker who wants to cultivate properly and serve the Jiang Sect.

They should, however, remain vigilant. They are yet to reach the scene of the fall of Lotus Pier. At the very least, they might determine what made him switch cultivation after.

After being tackled, the three slowly got up. Wei Wuxian wrapped his arms around them and asked, “Did you miss me?”

“Da shixiong, are you being punished like this in Cloud Recesses?” The Jiang disciple asked.

Wei Wuxian clicked his tongue and stood up. “No, they made me copy scriptures instead. Worse than any physical punishment,” he said as he walks away, the two disciples following behind him.

“And you still refused to follow the rules,” Lan Qiren mumbled, eliciting snorts from his first nephew and Cangse Sanren.

“Lotus Pier is better. Kneeling and horse stance is something!”

“And did you meet Lan Wangji?” the latter disciple inquired.

Lan Wangji’s ears perked up at the mention of his name.

“What about his cultivation base?”

“Hmm,” Wei Wuxian hummed in consideration, then grinned. “He's excellent, just like me!”

Lan Wangji was pleased to know that he had made a good impression on his husband in terms of cultivation a long time ago. His peers in the past could not compete with him. And if they were given the option of sparring with him, they would either do their best or be intimidated by him. Yet Wei Wuxian, a troublemaker with a golden heart, made him wonder if he was strong enough.

It was excellent. He was excellent.

“I heard, one would freeze to death within three steps of him. Is that true?” the former disciple inquired, eager to learn more about his time in Gusu.

“What kind of exaggerated belief is that?” Madam Lan chuckled, but there was a glint of displeasure in her eyes.

“Town folks have a tendency to exaggerate things. Even beliefs about Wei Wuxian were too much,” Mianmian said with a frown.

The ridiculous question made Wei Wuxian laugh. He then answered, “He’s a man, alright, not a monster.”

“What about the 3,000 rules of Gusu Lan Clan?”

“This is true.”

“It’s 4,000 now,” Lan Xichen blurted.

“What?!” Cangse Sanren exclaimed, her mouth agape. “You already had 3,000 and decided to add more? Is it even legal to breathe now?!”

“The rules that have been added,” Sizhui trailed off, his gaze drifting to his senior, who was laughing at the time, “had something to do with Senior Wei,” he revealed.

Cangse Sanren immediately glared at Lan Qiren, threatening, “When I visit Gusu, it would be my pleasure to shave your goatee, maybe even your hair.”

“To threaten someone is forbidden,” he snapped back, “and new rules have been established because your son is a menace.”

“Aren’t you a menace yourself?”

“Cangse, don't irritate him more,” Wei Changze mumbled, nodding his head in apology to Lan Qiren.

“They were carved all the way across a mountain!” Wei Wuxian responded with an exaggerated tone and the surroundings darkened.

After a brief period of darkness, a massive silver moon filled the screen, shining down to the earth, providing a view of a majestic sky. Then a red dragonfly flew towards the moon, and soon thousands joined it, coloring the clouds with an eerie yet beautiful red glow.

Then, Jiang Fengmian walked towards the pavilion, approaching Yu Ziyuan.

Both the Jiang Matriarch and Patriarch tensed. Their previous argument was mild but not good, but it got worse in this one.

The cultivators were uneasy now that the scene before them only had the Jiang Matriarch and Patriarch, implying that they would soon witness a fight or argument. If the Immortal decided to let them see this, it must contain very important information, but it was still a breach of privacy.

“Shouldn’t you skip this out, Grandmaster? This is not something we should see,” Xiao Xingchen said, and Baoshan Sanren turned to him.

“I can’t. This scene is very important,” she answered.

“How is our argument very important? It should be between me and my husband, not for everyone to see!” Yu Ziyuan hissed, fists clenching tightly.

“I know,” Baoshan Sanren stated emphatically, “but this scene will help us understand some things.”

Hearing the light footsteps, Yu Ziyuan set her cup of tea down and frowned as Jiang Fengmian greeted her with, “San-niang.”

She continued to frown at him before turning away and saying, “It’s already late at night. Why are you here?”

“I went to your room to look for you,” he responded softly, “and Jinzhu said you were here.”

“What’s the matter?” She inquired, voice surprisingly soft.

The cultivators did not comment, but on the screen, Yu Ziyuan looked incredibly…… sad and lonely, which surprised Jiang Fengmian, Jiang Wanyin, and Jiang Yanli. Despite the fact that their mother was strong and fierce, she never looked this sad, but then again, why would she ever show weakness in front of her family?

Yu Ziyuan scowled. It is because she’s also a vulnerable person that she does not want others to see it. She didn't want to be mocked for displaying a moment of weakness, nor did she want other people's pity, which she could sense now. Hands curling into a fist, she glared at the Immortal’s back.

Jiang Fengmian fished out a small box and pushed it towards her. She turned to look at the box on the table; her usual frown had returned. Raising her hand, she touched the surface of the box and opened it slowly. Inside was a beautifully crafted jade hair stick.

Yu Ziyuan stared, her hand inadvertently going inside her robes and touching the hidden hair stick her husband had given her earlier. Perhaps she'll start wearing it later.

She glared and averted her gaze from the gift. “Why did you buy this useless thing?” she inquired.

“This hair stick looks clear and lustrous,” he explained. “I found it pretty, so I bought it.”

Yu Ziyuan refused to speak.

Madam Jin felt bitter. Her friend was fortunate to have a husband like Jiang Fengmian because he at least cared about her. Her husband, however, was too preoccupied with entertaining his concubines and pursuing his own desires that he did not bother seeking for her. He did not even care for her. He’s more frightened of her temper and chose to abide by her words sometimes. Well, she loathes him anyway, but she did hope he would care at least.

She lets out a heavy sigh, and Jin Zixuan noticed this, so he turned to face his mother, holding her hand.

Seeing that his wife won’t speak, Jiang Fengmian sat down, leaning one elbow on the table, his back facing his wife’s back.

“San-niang, during my trip to Gusu, I discussed with Sect Leader Jin about A-Li’s betrothal,” he revealed, fully prepared for what was to come.

“A-Li’s betrothal was decided by me and Zixuan’s mother when they were still children. Is there a problem?” she inquired.

The issue was that Jin Zixuan had never met Yanli as a child. If he had, he might have considered the engagement; however, the engagement was announced when he was older and had witnessed the consequences of an arranged marriage through his parents, resulting in him expressing his displeasure with her.

He wished he had met her sooner and become friends with her.

“Sect Leader Jin and I have agreed to rescind the betrothal.”

Yu Ziyuan's eyes widened with surprise. “Why rescind it out of nowhere?”

“I used to think that affections between A-Li and Jin-gongzi are mutual. Now it seems like that’s not the case. Why must we coerce them?” he asked.

Yu Ziyuan turned around and glared at him. “A-Li has met Zixuan several times, and obviously has feelings for him.”

And that was obviously not the case, and Jin Zixuan made a huge mistake in not knowing her sooner.

“Did that Zixuan kid say anything? She asked and stands up. Even if her husband hadn't said anything yet, she already knew his answer. She then continues, “What do children know. A-Li is such a gem. Zixuan will undoubtedly fall for her later on.”

Yes, what she said was true, Jin Zixuan eventually fell in love with her, and they even had a child. It’s just unfortunate that his life got taken away early before he gets to see his son grow. He would’ve loved to be his son’s mentor and guide him when night hunting.

“Furthermore, Zixuan's mother and I have been childhood friends. Meishan Yu Clan and Zixuan’s mother’s clan are allies as well. Now if Jiang Clan and Jin Clan are connected through marriage, what are even the downsides?”

“But they are the ones who will be spending the rest of their lives together,” he reasoned, refusing to agree to his daughter marrying a loveless marriage. “If they do not care for each other, yet are forced into a marriage by parents’ wishes—”

“Like us?”

Jiang Fengmian lowered his head, while Yu Ziyuan stared at the screen, tense. Now the memory revealed their arranged marriage as well. The cultivators refused to speak because the vast majority of them were unmarried and unaware of clan marriages.

Jiang Fengmian was quite young when a clan—specifically Meishan Yu—proposed an arranged marriage between him and Yu Ziyuan. Jiang Fengmian's parents were intrigued by the offer, but he was not. He had no interest in Yu Ziyuan, and their personalities were diametrically opposed. However, Meishan Yu is a powerful clan as well, and being allies with them had numerous advantages and benefits. Still in the process of becoming a great sect leader, Jiang Fengmian was put under pressure. It took him some thought and time to accept the offer, and when they married, it wasn't long before they had multiple arguments and fights, forcing them to live apart.

Jiang Yanli felt sorry for her mother because she and Jin Zixuan, her mother and father, had gone through the same experience. Although Jin Zixuan returned her feelings, she had no idea if her father had also returned her mother's feelings. It was either he did or he did not, she did not know.

It was silent for a brief moment as Yu Ziyuan's rage rose and the wind began to pick up again.

“San-niang, you know that’s not what I meant.”

She clenched her fists and narrowed her eyes in rage, “That brat Wei Ying! Stirring up trouble whenever he goes!” she murmured.

Wei Wuxian flinched.

Jiang Wanyin wanted to shut her mother up on the screen, but he could not. He wanted to say *‘Why do you always blame him?’* but didn't, knowing her mother’s answer already.

Jiang Fengmian was surprised by the abrupt change in topic before he sighed and turned away. “You’re at it again. What does it have to do with A-Xian?”

Yu Ziyuan slammed her hands against the table and exclaimed, “Nothing to do with him?! If he had not caused a ruckus, would this betrothal end like this?! Ever since you brought that kid back to the Lotus Pier, you have never been impartial! If it was Jiang Cheng who got into trouble this time, would you have set out for Gusu so soon? You would never!”

Jiang Fengmian sighed, knowing he could not stop the memory. Jiang Wanyin, on the other hand, wanted to clutch his heart but refrained. It hurts him. It hurt that his father would never hurry to a sect if he was in trouble. Jiang Yanli clutched her brother's hand tightly, whispering words of comfort to him.

Meanwhile, Cangse Sanren was torn between rage and pity. Pity for the Jiang heir and anger that Yu Ziyuan blamed her son when he did nothing wrong. Although she should be grateful that Jiang Fengmian brought her son to their home and cared for him, she wanted to take it back. Her son had not had a happy childhood in that household; he had been abused. She wished that someone else had brought their son into a good home.

It may seem strange, but she'd rather let Lan Qiren look after her son because, despite his hatred for her, he knew he'd take good care of him and nurture him into a great cultivator. He would have to deal with the constant headaches, though; her son is a literally miniature version of her.

“San-niang!” Jiang Fengmian exclaimed in rage as he stood up.

Yu Ziyuan glared further at him before she continued, “This time, he broke off A-Li’s betrothal. Who knows what he will bring next time! But never mind, this Sect Leader here will clean up whatever mess he created anyway!”

Before Jiang Fengmian could respond, Yu Ziyuan was already walking past him.

The cultivators stood there watching as the Jiang Matriarch walked away. According to what they've gathered from this scene, Yu Ziyuan blamed Wei Wuxian for her daughter's marriage cancellation—which should not be the case because they believe he did what he needed to do—as well as Jiang Fengmian's favoritism towards Wei Wuxian, which is a factor of Jiang

Wanyin's jealousy towards his brother. And finally, Yu Ziyuan did not fully accept his husband's gift, which is unfortunate given that he may have brought it thinking of her.

In terms of the engagement, it was reasonable to call it off, but Yu Ziyuan was being unreasonable. It was as if she was ignoring her daughter's true feelings and overlooking Jin Zixuan's constant insults as if what he said were only mild insults just to force them to marry. To summarize, political marriages are and will always be the worst. But what says do they have in this? The two eventually ended up together.

Not far away from the pavilion, a silhouette stands next to a tree. He was staring across the pavilion Yu Ziyuan had walked off.

Lan Wangji's chest constricted. His husband heard everything. He'd already blamed himself; hearing it from the Jiang Matriarch would only make it worse.

"Wei Ying," he whispered and placed a kiss on his forehead.

"Don't worry, Lan Zhan," he responded, closing his eyes, just to feel his husband's lips on his forehead.

Wei Wuxian walked away, deciding to return to his room. As he walked through the empty hallways, the voice of Yu Ziyuan filled his mind.

"This time, he broke off A-Li's betrothal. Who knows what he will bring next time!"

Despite the worry and sadness in his heart, Wei Wuxian continued to walk, not daring to stop.

"Shijie," he whispered.

The raw and open expression that the cultivators saw through Wei Wuxian's face made everyone's hearts constrict. The kind, ever so smiling, and mischievous boy; for him to have these emotions, it did not seem right, no, it feels wrong. He should be smiling and getting into trouble all the time, as he usually does. However, those who continue to blame and criticize him will undoubtedly lower his self-esteem.

Some cultivations, however, did not share this sentiment. For them, they think Wei Wuxian deserves the blame for being reckless.

"Xian-gege, don't blame yourself," Sizhui whispered, feeling his heart suddenly heavy. If someone insulted his Xian-gege, he might respond in kind. He will not tolerate anyone who insults him, and he will not resort to talking because talking doesn't solve anything—which is unusual given that he is the last person to resort to violence.

"It's a good thing I wasn't born at this time," Jingyi said, his deep frown making some disciples step back. "I would have confronted her and defended Senior Wei."

"Please keep your voice down!" Zizhen cautioned. "If she hears you, we're dead! And I'm not planning to die this early!"

"I don't care; I'd be happy if she heard. Senior Wei is not to blame for her cruel words," Jingyi stated bluntly, and some disciples wondered where he got the courage to speak like this when he's usually the scaredy-cat one.

Wei Wuxian came to a halt when he noticed Jiang Yanli sitting down with cups of tea on the table. He moved his other feet as if deciding to approach her, only to stop and move them back. Really, how dare he try to approach her now, when he's the one responsible for his sister's engagement being called off?

"It was not your fault, A-Xian," Jiang Yanli begged him to believe her, but he couldn't, so he only gave her a forced smile, Fine then. She walked over to her brother and gently grabbed his hand. "No, please believe me. It was not your fault, okay?"

"Shijie—"

“Believe me.”

“……Alright.”

“A-Xian, is that you?” Jiang Yanli called out softly.

Wei Wuxian flinched and looked up at once. Then he descended the stairs to approach her as Jiang Yanli began pouring them a cup of tea.

“I’m sorry, Shijie…I—”

Instead of becoming enraged, Jiang Yanli laughed softly and said, “Silly A-Xian, that’s not your fault.”

“But, I made Shijie sad…”

Seriously, Wei Wuxian was far from the rumors that had been spread about him He was a very caring person who was only cruel when necessary or when the other person deserved it. Jin Ling felt even more stupid for believing and allowing himself to believe the rumors about his Uncle. But, on the other hand, who could blame him for believing?

Anyway, he's just glad to see that his uncle cared deeply for his mother and was willing to go to great lengths to defend and protect her.

Yanli looked at him, her eyes never burning with rage but always filled with kindness. “A-Xian, have a seat,” she instructed, and he did, sitting next to her.

“Since I was a young, mother has said that the young master of Jin Clan will be my husband,” she explained. “Jin-gongzi is radiant and handsome, despite the fact that we

have only met a few times."

Jin Zixuan had to take a deep breath to keep the blush from spreading, although Jiang Wanyin, Wei Wuxian, and Mianmian were already looking at him with a slight smirk on their lips as if he failed to do so.

"However, after giving it some thought, actually I…I'm not that into Jin-gongzi."

And Jin Zixuan flinched, but why should he be surprised? After badmouthing her, how can he expect her to still like him?

"A-Xuan, we're married," Jiang Yanli reminded after noticing him flinch. His son was also staring at him, and it made his shoulders slump, the heavy weight leaving. He tightly gripped her hand. He loved her, and he has learned from his mistakes and will continue to do so.

Wei Wuxian looked at her with surprise. Then she continues, "I do wish to be together with him till old and grey. But if our feelings are not mutual…"

"Shijie.."

Jiang Yanli looked over at his brother and started laughing when he saw his concerned expression.

"You must have started the fight because he said something, right?" she asked in amusement.

Wei Wuxian averted his gaze from her. "Nothing like that! I just…. thought he was annoying," he denied.

They weren't sure if he was serious about this or not. While it was true that Wei Wuxian did not like the Jin heir for hurting his sister, they are yet to know whether he held a grudge

against him.

“I thought he was annoying too,” Mianmian blurted out, and Madam Jin wholeheartedly agreed, causing Jin Zixuan to look at his best friend and mother with a betrayed look.

“Don't look at us that way; you know why we think that,” Madam Jin said, and Jin Zixuan averted his gaze. One might not notice, but Jin Ling noticed his father slightly pouting.

Jiang Yanli laughed and offered him a cup of tea, responding, “Little trickster, I saw you grow up. I know everything about you. You wouldn’t have started a fight for a reason like that.”

Wei Wuxian accepted the cup and saluted before scratching the back of his head, and Jiang Yanli rises from her seat. “A-Xian, you did nothing wrong. Though Jin-gongzi is attractive, I still want to seek my true love. Heart to heart, till the end.”

The cultivators were astounded by Jiang Yanli's maturity; even when Jin Zixuan insulted her, she remained kind and sweet; how could she be so? With abusive and neglectful parents, and was forced to marry someone who didn't love her back and constantly criticized her, they expected her to doubt her own worth and blame her brother, but she didn't. It didn't even occur to her to blame him at all.

They admit that, despite not being a strong cultivator, Jiang Yanli was already amazing.

“Ugh, no one really deserves you A-Jie,” Jiang Wanyin mumbled. “I mean no offense, Jin-gongzi.”

“Offense is taken,” he said, fully understanding what his brother-in-law had said.

Wei Wuxian looked down, taking in everything his sister said, then looked up at her. “Shijie, actually, Jin Zixuan is a lousy peacock, pompous, and arrogant,” he declared. “Shijie is so nice, she deserves a better man.”

In another location, Jin Zixuan abruptly sneezed inside his room.

A few cultivators snorted when they saw the Jin heir sneeze. Meanwhile, the said man was no longer bothered by Wei Wuxian's words. They were all true anyway.

“Whew, that was a wild ride.”

“I know, it was a lot to take in.”

“You should not say that. We have a lot more to see.”

“I’m still waiting for the Sunshot Campaign scene.”

One year had passed and seasons began to change. The lotuses began to bloom, their pink petals adding colors to the lake.

“Ah, lotuses are really pretty,” Nie Huaisang said, intending to paint them after the viewing.

“I really want to go back to Lotus Pier,” Jingyi said after a long silence.

“Jin Ling could show us around then,” Sizhui suggested as he turned to face the boy.

“Sure, just bring your money; I don't want to pay for any of your food.”

“Aww, you're not going to buy for us?” Zizhen teased, fluttering his lashes, making Jin Ling scowl.

“Fine then!”

“Yay!”

Abruptly, they were transported to a forest, where they focused on a pheasant who was completely unaware of the danger that was about to strike. Nearby, Wei Wuxian hid behind the bushes, holding a slingshot, aiming for the aforementioned animal.

“Nowhere to escape!” he smirked as he released the string, and the pheasant's cry echoed throughout the forest.

Jiang Wanyin and Yanli smiled as they saw their brother catching pheasants again. It was his and the other disciple’s favorite hobby.

“That was a perfect shot!”

“Wait till you see Wei-xiong with a real arrow,” Huaisang whispered to a Jiang disciple with a smile. His friend is so good, especially when it came to hunting.

“I would like to see that soon!”

“Me too!”

Then, carrying the captured pheasant over his shoulder, Wei Wuxian walks through the town. Hearing a commotion nearby, he turned towards the lake. Abruptly, his face lit up with a mix of excitement and youthfulness that made him appear impossibly attractive.

A boat with a flag of Yunmeng Jiang approached the pier, and a man in purple robes emerged, stretching his arms and yawning.

“Oh, Jiujiu has returned!” Jin Ling exclaimed, his gaze fixed on his young uncle.

Moments later, a body floated in the water, prompting Jiang Wanyin to look down and frown.

“Wait, is that..”

“Wei Wuxian,” Jiang Wanyin sighed exasperatedly. On the side, Wei Wuxian delightedly snorted.

“Stop right there,” he instructed the servant. The body in the water—Wei Wuxian—did not move or emerge to breathe. Jiang Wanyin took up a bamboo pole and began poking his brother.

Several cultivators snorted, and some sighed exasperatedly. They begin to wonder how he is Yunmeng Jiang's Head Disciple.

“Does he do this every time?” Lan Xichen wondered, his lips quirking up in amusement.

“Multiple times,” Jiang Wanyin replied to the Sect Leader.

“We do it to scare our disciples,” Wei Wuxian adds, winking.

“Ah, kids,” Nie Mingjue sighed with an unimpressed look on his face.

Bubbles started to pop on the surface, prompting Jiang Wanyin to lean down even more to check.

“Wahh!” Wei Wuxian screamed, leaping from the water and surprising Jiang Wanyin into falling back. Delightedly laughing, Wei Wuxian leaned onto the edge of the boat.

“You are finally back!” he exclaimed.

Jiang Wanyin had sorely missed this. He missed being greeted by his brother when he returned home—more like pranking him, which irritated him and made him happy. Glancing briefly at his brother, he also noticed the fond expression on his face while focusing on the screen. He didn't want to assume, but it appears that his brother missed this as well.

“I thought you were infatuated with girls in Gusu and didn’t want to come back!”

“Funny how you thought that but you married a Lan,” Wen Qing remarked, smirking at Wei Wuxian.

Recalling his friend's words from the previous scenes, he remarked, “Ironic, indeed.”

Wei Wuxian grinned, playing the ends of his husband’s ribbon. “Well, expect the unexpected.”

Jiang Wanyin stood up and began wiping his face before breaking into laughter, which he then forced into a frown. “I’m not like you,” he assuredly replied.

Wei Wuxian continued to laugh as he climbed onto the boat and extended his hand to Jiang Wanyin. The other took it and drew himself up.

“Where have the others gone?” he inquired.

“Practicing archery on the training field,” he informed. “The Discussion Conference will be held shortly, and the archery match will begin on the first day.”

“It’ll be hosted by Qishan Wen Clan this year, right?” Jiang Wanyin wondered.

At the mention of the Wen Clan, everyone immediately knew and tensed. The start of the archery competition will most likely be the next memory.

“We'll finally see the rest of the Wen Clan soon,” Jingyi said, half excited and half concerned.

“Senior Wei mentioned archery competition; does this mean we'll get to see him hunt with an arrow soon?” Zizhen inquired, eyes twinkling with delight.

Wei Wuxian turned to face Zizhen with an amused grin. “Yes, kids! This humble one will beat your Hanguang-jun!”

“No way!” the disciples denied.

Wei Wuxian dramatically clutches his chest, as if something has pierced it. Ugh, you refused to believe me after many nights of hunting we all did together?”

“You only managed to beat Lan Wangji after what you did,” Jiang Wanyin interjected.

“What did he do Jiujiu?” Jin Ling inquired, eyeing suspiciously at Wei Wuxian.

“Aiya, wait for the next scene! I'm sure you'll be surprised, especially Grandmaster Lan!”

At the mention of Lan Qiren, the said man immediately glared at him, recalling the mistake Wei Wuxian made that his nephew reported.

“Yes, in the Nightless City,” Wei Wuxian answered, transporting them to a place with towering temples and buildings. The screen then went dark, indicating the end of the memory.

That was the Nightless City before the battle. The said place looks the same today, though some buildings have been destroyed and it is completely isolated from people.

“So that was the Nightless City,” mumbled Sizhui. The current disciples had not visited the mentioned location because it was forbidden, so they had no idea what the Wen territory looked like. They could tell by the towering temples and the aura of that place that it was ruled by a very powerful leader, more powerful than the rest of the clans.

“That place looks scary,” Zizhen said, his excitement gradually fading.

On the side, Wen Ning confirmed, “It is.”

The disciples believed him as he was a Wen member from Wen Rouhan's time.

“So that was the end of the memory,” Baoshan Sanren informed, “and it will start in five minutes.”

“The competition will be the next memory, which means we're near to the—” Nie Mingjue paused, his gaze fixed on the Jiang family. If the fall of the Lotus Pier is near, then that means the Sunshot Campaign is also near. He'll see Meng Yao, the man he despises, again.

Yu Ziyuan abruptly understood what Nie Mingjue refused to finish and clenched her hands. Before she worries about her home, she should be concerned about seeing that stupid woman —Wen Chao's woman—again. She was undoubtedly one of the causes of her home's destruction. If they managed to prevent that woman from sending that signal, the sect might

have had time to prepare. But then again, Wens was fully prepared and had a solid plan for demolishing her home, so all of the planning was pointless—useless.

“But before that, there’s still the scene of Xuanwu of Slaughter in Dusk Creek Mountain,” Mianmian interjected, recalling the time Wang Lingjiao almost branded her to ruin her beauty, which she begs to differ, she was not beautiful, but she also did not see herself as someone ugly either.

As the cultivators conversed, Baoshan Sanren declared, “The privacy barriers are still available. Do any of you still want to speak with your families?”

This time, it was Nie Mingjue who raised his hand first, looking down at his younger brother, who was sweating anxiously. “I'd like to speak with Huaisang privately,” he said, returning his gaze to the immortal.

“Very well.”

“I'd like to speak with my family as well,” Jiang Fengmian requested. He first spoke with his wife; now it is time for the entire family to talk to address some issues and feelings. Except for Jiang Fengmian, the Jiang family looked at him with surprise. Jiang Yanli jerked her head towards her brother, who was paling slightly.

Jiang Wanyin wanted to run away. He did not know what to do. He didn't want to confront his father about his feelings, but at the same time, he needed to.

“A-Cheng, it will be alright.” Jiang Yanli softly reassured.

“Yes, Jiujiu! You’ll be okay!”

He would have silenced his nephew if he wasn't so emotional right now, but he needed to hear that.

“Of course,” Baoshan Sanren replied, her hands shining in gold. She was ready to erect the barriers, to erect the barriers, believing they would be the last, but she was mistaken. A reluctant hand raised, catching her attention.

“Lan Qiren?” Cangse Sanren wondered.

The man had a determined expression on his face, but if you looked at him closely, you could see a hint of anger and irritation. Lan Qiren then stated firmly, “I would like to speak privately with my brother and his wife, please.”

Madam Lan noticed her husband's brother's hard expression and knew the conversation would not be pleasant. She knew Lan Qiren was still upset with her, but whatever this man had to say to her, she would listen and explain properly.

“Uncle..” Lan Wangi stepped forward, feeling concerned for her mother.

“It’s okay, A-Zhan,” she reassured, giving her son a sweet smile.

Baoshan Sanren nodded. “Your request will be granted.”

Chapter End Notes

Hello! I apologize for not uploading in such a long time! I was drained after my final exams and had no energy to write. Even the fan art I created wasn't finished yet, but I'll

finish it soon and edit this once it is. Thank you for looking forward to this chapter; I hope you enjoy it! See you in the following chapter!

And please don't mind if I keep editing some of these chapters; I'm just double-checking to see if I there are more mistakes; nothing major will be changed. GOODBYE!

Archery Competition

Chapter Notes

> Man, I thought I was going to die from overwork. Perhaps, if I pushed myself to my limits again. Fainting doesn't sound so bad now does it?

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The privacy barriers have been erected. Qingheng-jun stood protectively in front of his wife in case his younger brother would do something. Lan Qiren sighed, anger rising within him. His older brother had always been protective of the woman who had murdered his teacher, which he both understood and found perplexing. In all his life, not once did he experience the feeling of love, of being in love with someone else specifically, so he does not comprehend his older brother's love and how deep it is. He doesn't understand why he would marry and protect a murderer, despite his older brother's feelings not being reciprocated.

To be fair, his older brother should despise her as much as he does. She was the reason his older brother broke the rules, despite the fact that he was the most ideal role model for all cultivators, a perfect rule-abiding and gentle man admired by thousands. All of this came crashing down because of one woman and was punished for defending a woman he barely knew, forcing him to take full responsibility and lead his sect. He and his son, ironically, are very similar.

“I haven't forgiven you yet,” Lan Qiren blurted, hands clenched beneath his long robes.

“I understand,” she said quietly, her head bowed. “I did not forgive myself either.”

“That’s fair, you killed—”

“Qiren!” Qingheng-jun interrupted, noticing his wife lowering her head in shame. “Do not say it that way.”

“How do you want me to say it, brother?” he asked, his jaw clenched and his hands pointing at her. “She killed one of our teachers, the teacher who had been nothing but kind to her!”

“She had her reasons!” Qingheng-jun argued. “Whatever her motivations were, it had to be significant.”

Lan Qiren looked at his brother, who was looking away. This is meaningless. No matter how much he argues with him, he will always defend her.

“What must be her reason to kill our teacher?” he viciously demanded. He had not been present when she killed their teacher, but the elders stated that she appeared to have developed resentment towards their teacher, and what was more frustrating was that she refused to voice her reason, remaining silent throughout the trial. If the stated reason was significant, she should have revealed it, unless she was a secret spy from another sect, which is also unlikely given her status as a rogue cultivator, but at some point, all possibilities were possible.

“I killed your teacher to be despised,” she admitted, her gaze now piercing Lan Qiren's. The two Lans looked at her, perplexed. “I had an assumption that Qingheng-jun held affection for me, but I don’t reciprocate the feeling. At that time, his love for me was too overwhelming; it made me want to get away from him.”

Qingheng-jun froze, his breath stopping for a moment. His love was too overwhelming? Made her want to get away?

She then continues, “And to get away from him, I need to do something, to make Qingheng-jun despise me and never see me again.”

“And to do that, you decided to kill our teacher,” Lan Qiren concluded, jaws clenching. That was all? All she wanted was to be despised? This reason was utterly not important, reasonable, or understandable; it was entirely preposterous—outrageous. Qingheng-jun seemed to agree with his brother’s sentiment, but he was too distracted, his heart slowly breaking.

“You have many reasons to be despised, yet you chose to kill…….with no mercy…”

Madam Lan remained silent, fumbling anxiously at the ends of her sleeves. She knows the reason is insane, crazy even, but she couldn't come up with anything else. She tried to break the rules, but the Sect Leader was too adamant to keep her around. She was desperate to escape him. For her, Qingheng jun's actions toward her appeared obsessive. She also heard that the Lans only love once, and their love is fierce and dangerous; a terrifying and staggering feeling that any woman would be afraid of.

Lan Qiren tried to control his breathing. He should not get angry here or nothing will be solved, so he responded, “If you have chosen to reveal this to him, you could’ve gotten away. My brother will let you go.” Lan Qiren glanced at Qingheng-jun, who is still staring at his wife, expression full of pain and dread.

Madam Lan sighs. “I have considered that as well, but as you can see, I am a bit of a coward.”

Lan Qiren desperately wanted to laugh. A bit? She was a complete coward who refused to face the consequences of her actions. It was fortunate that his brother was in love and a sect leader, so establishing protection by marrying her was simple, if not a bit complicated. This woman, this woman, is the reason his brother changed and brought pain to him for a short time. The reason she revealed will never be enough for him to forgive her. He doubts that his brother feels the same way.

“Your cowardice to speak the truth led to misfortune. Did you consider how my brother would react if you killed our teacher? Did you consider his feelings at all?” He inquired, causing Qingheng-jun to turn to face him.

“Qiren—”

“Do not interrupt!”

“A desperate person would never have time to think about others,” Madam Lan admitted.

“No, a desperate person will always consider different, rational alternatives. You just refused to act on them, you mur—”

“Qiren!”

“Why do you continue to defend her?!” Lan Qiren viciously demanded, his restraint slowly snapping. “You heard her confess her crime, yet you’re still overlooking this? You're still blinded by your love for her? I've told you many times that she hurt you! She is your mistake!”

“She is not a mistake!” Qingheng-jun snapped. “If she is, are you also implying that our children are a mistake?” he asked, and Lan Qiren remained silent. His nephews were anything but a mistake. He raised them until they grew up. He adores and cares for them. Seeing that his brother refuses to speak, he continues, “Yes she hurt me, but I am only human, Qiren. A weak man for a wonderful woman,” Qingheng-jun admitted in defeat, turning to his wife, who was staring at him with wide eyes, clearly in disbelief.

“A wonderful woman?” Lan Qiren glared at Madam Lan, somewhat triggered. “She is anything but wonderful. At some point, you must’ve despised her as I do.”

Qingheng-jun momentarily remained silent, as if contemplating what to say before he responded with a soft, “Yes, I did despise her in the past.”

“In the past,” Lan Qiren repeated, his gaze intense towards the couple. During his brother's seclusion, he would frequently bring up the subject with him, but his brother refused to listen and continued to ignore him. Meanwhile, during his brother's wife's imprisonment, he remained distant from her, refusing to speak with her during his monthly visits with her sons in order to keep his anger at bay. Why did he even try to discuss this matter with him? No matter what he says, his words will forever be unheard.

Lan Qiren lets out a frustrated sigh. “This conversation is pointless if I can't change your mind.” His brother is stubbornly in love, and so was his second son.

Qingheng-jun, clearly tired of this argument, sighed as well. “Let’s not dwell on the past, Qiren; I've long moved on from the accident.”

Lan Qiren wanted to retort, *‘That’s easy for you to say’*, yet he chose to keep it to himself. Later on, they will understand why he refuses to let go of this matter. He scoffed, and with a flick of his sleeves, he turned away from them. When he looked ahead, he noticed Lan Xichen looking at them with concern. He looked at Lan Wangji. Though his face appeared neutral and indifferent, the way his fists were clenched tightly clearly states his feelings.

Before he step out of the barrier, his brother’s wife spoke, “I know you will never forgive me, Lan Qiren, but I wanted to say thank you, for taking care of our sons.”

Lan Qiren was more than glad to take care of their sons. At first, expected to be angry when he saw his brother's sons; they were, after all, a reminder of his brother's union with that woman, but he wasn't, and he later realized that the children were innocent and not to blame for their parent’s actions. He taught them cultivation, the sect's history, how to hunt, and how to fight. Watching them grow up under his tutelage and become excellent role models for their peers, he was beyond proud.

“Before we step out, I just wanted to say that you are not obligated to forgive us, but A-Huan and A-Zhan will be concerned if you show them your displeasure towards their mother,” Qingheng-jun said softly, taking a brief glance at his sons. “I don’t care if they won’t worry about me; I haven't seen or been with them in the past—I have no right to deserve their concerns—but please refrain from expressing your displeasure with my wife. Is that all right, Qiren?”

Lan Qiren remained still, refusing to respond, but Qingheng-jun knows that he is considering this.

“Be grateful that your sons love you, Madam Lan. If you tell them the truth about the accident, they will either disregard the crime or be upset about it. They are more likely to feel the latter. After all, their mother was a murderer and their father was a tenacious lover,” Lan Qiren paused, turning slightly to the couple with a frown. Qingheng-jun looked like he was about to protest, but he quickly continued, “Know that the accident and my brother’s rash decision was a total humiliation and disgrace to the sect.”

Madam Lan and Qingheng-jun looked torn and ashamed, but the latter's slight determination made Lan Qiren scoff mockingly. “We are not finished with this matter, Qingheng-jun, Madam Lan,” With that, he stepped through the barrier.

Lan Xichen and Lan Wangji had been staring at them for a while. They were concerned because their uncle's face frequently morphed into anger and frustration, their mother looked down as if ashamed, and their father protected their mother. They speculated that the subject under discussion is the accident from years ago. Both wanted to know, but they also understood that the elders needed to talk about it first. Then their uncle turned around and stared at them with finality.

“Is uncle really that angry?” Lan Xichen inquired, but Lan Wangji was unable to respond. When Lan Qiren approached his nephews, it was Xichen who stepped forward first, eager to know what they discussed.

“Uncle, what—”

“Xichen,” His uncle interrupted. A rare occurrence that answered all his concerns. “Your father and mother will tell you,” he said and walked past him.

Lan Xichen turned to face his brother, who had his eyes on his uncle’s form, eyes full of unanswered questions, yet understanding his uncle's refusal to speak. As he approaches his brother's side, Wei Wuxian is looking at the brothers with concern. Instantaneously, his mind began to recall his brother-in-law’s speculation after he told him the story of his mother and father.

Maybe it was true that his father only imprisoned his mother because he could not forgive his mother for killing his teacher, but neither could he allows harm to come to the woman he loved. Yet the secret he wanted to know was his mother's motivation for murdering his father's teacher. If asked if he and Wangji were prepared to hear the truth, they do not know.

“Brother,” Lan Wangji called out.

“I know, Wangji. They will tell us soon, and we will listen to everything, alright?”

“Yes, Brother.”

Meanwhile, the Nie brothers had been quiet since they entered the barrier, Nie Mingjue looking down at him while Nie Huaisang refusing look at him, choosing to hide his face behind his fan.

“Da-ge,” the younger Nie whispered, and the older one only responded with a contemplative hum.

Years have truly passed. Last time, his younger brother was only about his shoulders tall, so small and fragile. Now he’d grown a little, his height now reaching his chin. Compared to in the past, his shoulders were now broad, and his body is still leaner but a bit more muscular. His personality, on the other hand, remained unchanged. He still exudes a nervous demeanor unbefitting of a sect leader. Nie Mingjue had predicted this before he died, that his brother would never follow in his footsteps. He reasoned that following his own path, focusing on the arts rather than saber training, was a better option than jeopardizing his own life.

“Did you plot Meng Yao’s downfall?” Nie Mingjue asked, breaking the silence. As previously stated, because a fierce corpse lacks consciousness, he lacks complete knowledge of what occurred after. He only wanted to kill Jin Guangyao and slaughter all Jin-blooded people. When he died, his younger brother was with him. It made him think that perhaps Huaisang was devastated and grieving, and as a result, he sought out the person who killed him.

Nie Mingjue then observed his brother's tightening grip on his fan and snapped it shut. His nervous demeanor had morphed into something he couldn't place, and he was concerned about asking the wrong question.

“He orchestrated most of the crimes in the past,” he responded coldly. “Including your death. That’s enough reason for me to avenge you and plan his downfall, Da-ge.”

“You did not have to do—”

“No, Da-ge, I had to!” Huaisang protested, fists clenching tightly. “He planned your death ahead of time by playing Cleansing to you! He swapped portions of that tone for pieces from the Collection of Turmoil! Not only that, but he even cut your body to pieces! How was I supposed to sleep at night knowing my older brother had been chopped like a lifeless pig by someone who I trusted for years?!”

The betrayal of discovering Jin Guangyao is the reason his brother died is as traumatic for Huaisang as the death itself, because it becomes, *‘Not only is my only living family member prematurely dead in horrific circumstances, but the one responsible is someone I thought of as my protector.’* Rightly or wrongly, Nie Huaisang believes there is no human being left in the world he can trust or who actually cares about him. He lost the only person who loved him, despite his temper and strictness.

Nie Mingjue understood his brother’s sentiments. He, too, had long trusted Meng Yao. He even wrote him a recommendation letter, convinced that he deserved much recognition and approval from his father, Jin Guangshan, only for him to betray his trust. He even remembered how alarmed he was after finding him using the techniques of the Qishan Wen to kill his commander, as well as his ability to switch from cold and calculating to panicked and tearful, completely manipulating him all along.

“You would’ve put yourself in danger if he found out!” Nie Mingjue argued. “Meng Yao isn’t just some caring and calm person, he is intelligent and dangerous!”

“You think I don’t know that Da-ge?” Nie Huaisang retorted, tears welling up in the corners of his eyes. “For years, I thought it was only qi deviation that killed you, but no, he contributed to your death by playing the ostensibly cleansing for you. For years, I had been completely unaware of what was going on around me. I had lamented and been devastated. It was extremely difficult and exhausting to become a Sect Leader with no prior experience. A realization came upon me that I relied on you far too much.”

Nie Mingjue’s face may appear neutral, but he was hurting inside. The fact that knew his brother was incapable of handling any political matters—which he had attempted to train him for—made his heart clenched. More importantly, their last quarrel was the worst, and they were yet to reconcile after that, but then he suffered from qi deviation, forcing him to leave his brother from the world, with no one else by his side.

“I really regretted a lot of things, Da-ge. I wish I had listened to you once, and I wish I had done more, but then I discovered the truth and used that knowledge to my advantage,” Nie Huaisang paused, smiling. “Manipulating, spying, and being the nervous and cowardly individual that I am, no one suspected me at all, not even him, making it easier for me to orchestrate his downfall quietly.”

Nie Mingjue narrowed his gaze. “We both despise Meng Yao, and yet you’re acting like him.”

“Of course,” Nie Huaisang responded, chuckling humourlessly. “I am, after all, dealing with someone who is far more manipulative than I am. If I want to completely fool him, I've got to act like him. But we are also different Da-ge. He is simply cruel and evil, murdering those who threaten or insult him. He killed many people in order to carry out his plans. I am only avenging the person he took away from me and did the cultivation world a huge favor.”

Everything about Huaisang's approach is diametrically opposed to Nie Mingjue's mentality, but it's Huaisang's willingness to use others that would have made Nie Mingjue recoil. This is what Nie Mingjue cannot forgive Meng Yao for: ‘why are other people's lives more important than his own?’ Huaisang and Meng Yao both sacrifice others in pursuit of what they believe is a justified higher goal, implying that, rightly or wrongly, they believe they need to live because they are individually too valuable to the cause; in their own minds, they aren't expendable, whereas others are.

This was not an act of righteousness at all. But then again, if his brother hadn't used others as pawns, what chance did he have of bringing Meng Yao down? Jin Guangyao would have gotten away with everything and would still be killing those he considers a threat. Nonetheless, he rejects his brother's schemes. He wants to be mad, but what’s done is done. What he feels right now is irrelevant.

“No one was killed while working for you, right?” Nie Mingjue asked.

“Do cats count?” Nie Huaisang sheepishly inquired, causing the older Nie’s brows to twitch.

“You killed cats?”

“Yes?” This came out more as a question than a response, and Nie Mingjue glared at him. Really, is his brother truly incapable of expressing himself other than by glaring at him? “Yes, I killed cats! It was to lure other disciples to Yi City—”

“You dragged the disciples into your schemes?!” Nie Mingjue exclaimed, nose flaring in rage. He wouldn't mind if his brother killed a bunch of cats, but dragging disciples into his schemes would have put them in danger, as well as him if they discovered he was the one who lured them.

“No disciples were harmed, Da-ge!” Nie Huaisang hastily explained. “Wei-xiong and Hanguang-jun protected them!”

The older Nie's glare was unwavering.

“Anyway, you'll see soon enough, and I'll explain everything!”

Nie Mingjue’s glare deepens momentarily before he sighs. “Fine. Explain later, in detail.”

“Yes, Da-ge.”

Nie Mingjue stared at his brother, whose head was lowered, and used his fan to scratch his head. The desire he had earlier to do something to make his brother look at him in awe, overwhelmed his senses. His gaze shifted to his head, and his hand twitched as if he wanted to ruffle his hair. Of course, he restrained himself; this was so out of his character, but the desire to ruffle his hair was so strong that he slowly raised his hand.

Nie Huaisang trembled. His brother is going to hit him. He’s going to hit him so hard. Well, after all of his manipulating and spying, he figured he deserved this incoming hit. He closed his eyes, expecting the hit and any pain, but it didn't come, and he didn't open them yet, afraid of catching a glimpse of his brother's dark expression. Instantly, a hand was placed on his head, causing him to shoot up and look at his brother in surprise.

“Da-ge?” he mumbled, confused.

Nie Mingjue did not speak; he just let his hand rest on his younger brother’s head. “I do not approve of all your schemes, but at least you’re safe,” he said, ruffling his younger brother's hair.

Nie Huaisang stared at his older brother in disbelief. He had never gone so far as *'ruffling his hair'* before; rather, he had always been chastised and forced to practice his saber. Tears welled up in the corners of his eyes, and he smiled broadly. This was a completely new sensation for him, and all the dirty work of avenging his brother suddenly seemed worthwhile. Nie Mingjue didn't smile; he couldn't right now, but he did feel warm inside. Putting his hand down, he turned away from him and stepped out of the barrier. Nie Huaisang followed a minute later.

“They look better,” Wei Wuxian commented, seeing how wide his friend’s smile was. “But I think Chifeng-zun is quite upset about Huaisang’s schemes.”

Lan Wangji did not respond to him, but he thought the same.

The last erected privacy barrier was occupied by the Jiang family, who were still struggling to find the right moment to speak. Yu Ziyuan was growing impatient, Jiang Yanli was becoming restless, and Jiang Fengmian was anxious.

“A-Cheng,” Jiang Fengmian began, slowly stepping forward, only to have his son step back, his head lowered as if he didn't want to face his father right now, which Jiang Fengmian understood but his heart constricted.

“A-Cheng, raise your head!” Yu Ziyuan ordered, unwilling to waste any more time. “Why are you looking down?”

“San-niang,” Jiang Fengmian warns, shaking his head. His wife scoffed and crossed his arms.

“A-Niang, A-Die, this one wonders what will be discussed right now,” Jiang Yanli said. Her tone remained soft and calm, but in reality, she was also anxious. There had been hints as to what would be discussed at this time, and she is concerned that it may not go as well as she had hoped, acknowledging the presence of her mother, ready to intervene if the discussion becomes heated. She unconsciously reaches for her brother's hands, which are now slightly trembling.

“A-Cheng, A-Li, we are sorry,” Jiang Fengmian said with difficulty. He had so much to say right now, but the right words were getting stuck in his tongue, and he was having trouble expressing himself. Jiang Yanli and Jiang Wanyin remained still in their places, half expecting this but also surprised. Jiang Fengmian turned to face his wife, his eyes conveying words that the siblings couldn't understand. Yu Ziyuan scoffed again, refusing to say what his husband desired, so Jiang Fengmian returned his attention to his children.

“We know we haven't been the best parents you wished us to be,” he paused, observing his children’s expressions. “Our constant fights affected you both the most, and for that, we are sorry.” Jiang Fengmian bowed lower than usual, shocking Jiang Yanli and Jiang Wanyin once more. Yu Ziyuan drew her gaze down to her husband, secretly pleased, but because she’s not like him, she couldn't bow to her children yet. Her pride wouldn't let her, but she promised she'd do it when she was ready and had the right words.

“A-Die, raise your head,” Jiang Yanli said, taking a step forward and grabbing her father's hand, while Jiang Wanyin stood motionless. “It was all in the past.”

Jiang Fengmian forced a smile. His daughter is really kind, so kind that he feels like he does not deserve any ounce of it.

“A-Li, A-Cheng, we are sorry for not treating you better, for not being there when you needed—”

“Why?” Jiang Wanyin interjects, his jaw and hand clenching. “Why apologize now?”

“A-Cheng—”

Jiang Wanyin stopped her sister and breathed in. “A-Die, in the past, I truly believed I was despised by you simply because I was not as good as Wei Wuxian, that my skills were unsatisfactory, and that I also thought I may not be a perfect son fit to be the next Sect Leader. I even started to question if I was even your son,” Jiang Wanyin explained, his body shaking in anxiousness and anger. The desire to speak of what had gone unsaid years ago was so strong that he might as well express himself now.

“No, A-Cheng—”

“Do not interrupt me, A-Die,” Jiang Wanyin snapped, and the Jiang family clamp their mouths shut, willing to hear everything he has to say. “The idea that A-Die favored Wei Wuxian over me was planted in my head by A-Niang in an attempt to build a wall between my siblings and A-Die, and when A-Niang succeeded, I took it as confirmation that what she said was the truth.”

Jiang Fengmian couldn't believe what he was hearing and turned to face his wife, who glared at him.

“What? Is that not the truth?”

“No, it is not,” Jiang Fengmian responded calmly, not wanting to add fuel to his wife's fire.

“To be honest, I've always been afraid of you, A-Die,” Jiang Wanyin revealed further, trying hard not to cry in front of his parents again, but Jiang Yanli can see through him, and it hurts her to see her brother struggling and in pain, like a bird caged within towering walls, wailing in the middle of the night for help to be freed. She never wanted to see this kind of emotion from her brother again.

“You frighten me so much; I could not seek you if I wanted to, but Wei Wuxian could easily come to you, and I was envious every time I saw you two together.”

Jiang Fengmian realized at that point that he had failed as a parent. He was aware that he was being cold to his son, but it was necessary. In a room full of Sect Leaders, there’s going to be that one harsh leader, either trying to ruin the other leader's image, bringing him down, or

wishing for his downfall, and he wants his son to take all of that with ease and handle it carefully yet tactfully, so he acted cold, thinking it would toughen up his son's heart, but it appears the outcome was something he did not expect. He had no idea that his coldness toward his son would lead to his son's insecurity. His coldness was misunderstood as silent anger and intimidation.

“Did I truly fail as a son? Am I not worthy of even an ounce of your support and attention? Your love and praise? Your approval?” Jiang Wanyin inquired, his voice cracking as he looked up to his father.

“You are more than worthy of it, A-Che—”

“A-Li,” Yu Ziyuan cut in, silencing his daughter.

“That was all I ever wanted, but I was never granted any of it. At some point, I began to feel envious of my own brother, who wasn’t even trying to show off because he’s naturally good at everything, but I didn't let my emotions control me. I loved and cared for him, but it was always your praises and approval of him that drove my jealousy to new heights, and mother's words served as the catalyst,” Jiang Wanyin quickly wipes the tear forming in his eyes to avoid humiliation.

“You held Wei Wuxian within days of his arrival at Lotus Pier, while you only held me a handful of times; you took away my puppies because of him; you regard him so highly that you appointed him as a head disciple despite his mischievous nature, while I remain as the Jiang heir, seeking his parents' approval; it's always been him, and it always will be him! Why wasn't I the first choice for once? You, *her*, and even Wei Wuxian turned their backs on me! I am always left alone in the dark!” Jiang Wanyin exclaimed, expressing all of his resentment, not caring if his parents would get mad at him for shouting at them, but in his defense, they deserved to know what he has been feeling all these years. He no longer wishes to harbor this resentment.

The rest of them felt their hearts clench. Jiang Wanyin had always been the child who kept his feelings to himself rather than expressing them. Seeing him express all of this now, however, was heart-breaking and despairing. Jiang Yanli, too, noticed tears welling up in the corners of his eyes. Yu Ziyuan avoided making eye contact, as if she couldn't bear seeing him cry when, in truth, it was breaking her. Jiang Fengmian, on the other hand, felt he deserved

his son's rage and resentment. No, he deserved a good beating from him, and he doesn't care if he suffers serious injuries as long as his son is satisfied.

“And you, A-Niang,” Jiang Wanyin paused before turning to face his mother, who was shifting her gaze at him, fiercely staring at him to conceal her emotions. “Your cruel words were anything but pleasant and helpful; they were hurtful that it resulted in low self-esteem and self-deprecation. Did you know, your words were the exact reason why Wei Wuxian thinks so low of himself?” he asked, and Yu Ziyuan frowned; why was she even the reason? Everything she said to that boy was to remind him of his place in the family and to chastise him for causing trouble.

“A-Niang, your words were both the trigger of my insecurity and Wei Wuxian’s low self-esteem and self-deprecation,” he clarified, making Yu Ziyuan frown even more.

“Are you implying that I abused both of you psychologically?” Yu Ziyuan inquired sharply.

“Not only me but also A-Die,” he added, turning to look at his father, whose expression was crestfallen.

Yu Ziyuan remained silent, and Jiang Wanyin suspected that his mother was already aware of his verbal abuse.

After a brief silence, Jiang Fengmian said, “A-Cheng, I don't despise you. I never hated you, and I apologize if you were led to believe I did. I had some issues that I couldn't deal with, and I had to act cold towards you to toughen your heart because you were going to be a Sect Leader soon, but it appears my coldness resulted in something else I didn't want you to ever feel,” he explained, slowly walking forward towards him and relieved that his son did not back away.

“I understand why you have to be strict with me, but I don't understand why you won't look my way and praise me like you do when you're with Wei Wuxian. You refused to show and give me love. When I was in trouble, you refused to go to other sects. Your previous actions led me to believe you despised me. It always breaks my heart. A-Die.” Jiang Wanyin couldn't keep the tears from falling from his eyes any longer, and Yu Ziyuan desperately wanted to wipe his son's tears away but refused to do so.

If Jiang Wanyin had to say so, this was pitiful. Several eyes could be on them right now. A part of him felt humiliated for being so vulnerable, but at the time, he didn't care and just cried. He used to cry a lot in silence, with no one to comfort him or wipe his tears away at night, but now that he has his family back, with his parents trying to mend their relationship and express their feelings, he doesn't care if the cultivators mock him.

Jiang Fengmian reached out, and Jiang Wanyin remained motionless, allowing the former to slowly embrace his son, not too tightly in case he wanted to move away.

“I’m sorry. I’m so sorry, A-Cheng,” he whispered, his voice trembling as if he, too, wanted to wail. “I failed at many things, including failing as a parent to you and A-Li. Regardless, I love both of you and understand if you still harbor resentment toward me and your mother, but please know that you did not, and will never, fail me. It was my actions that led you to believe I despised you, and I did nothing to correct that misunderstanding. Everything was my fault, so never doubt your value. I am proud of you for accomplishing so much,” he said, brushing his son's hair. Jiang Wanyin's body trembles and sobs escape his lips. He couldn't believe he'd just heard his father praise him. It made him feel stupidly giddy and warm inside. Jiang Yanli was also crying, but with a smile on her lips.

“What Nie Huaisang said earlier was not far from the truth. It's not that I don't care about A-Xian, but I do care less about him than you because you're my son,” Jiang Fengmian adds, his words not comforting the latter. Jiang Fengmian breaks the hug and wipes the tears gently as if he's afraid his son will break.

“We apologize for not being the best parents, A-Li and A-Cheng, but I and San-niang are working hard to be better; we understand if you do not forgive us; we did a lot of terrible things in the past; I just hope you will give us a chance to be better parents to you,” Jiang Fengmian said, offering his hand to his wife who looked at it briefly before looking up to her children and taking his hand in hers. “It may take some time for us to improve, but we will get there. I want us all to be able to communicate with one another comfortably without miscommunication.”

Jiang Yanli and Jiang Wanyin wanted it to happen so much that they nodded. The former held her brother’s hand more tightly, laughing delightedly, while the latter continued sobbing, Yu Ziyuan looking pleased by the positive reaction. Despite the fact that she didn't say much, her husband had already said what she wanted to say. Though she wanted to say something about

the whole favoring Wei Wuxian and the Cangse Sanren thing, this moment was priceless. She didn't want to ruin the moment, so she remained silent.

“A-Li, we're sorry for not taking your feelings into account in the past,” Jiang Fengmian said, taking a step closer to her daughter, who only shook her head in response.

“There's no need, A-Die, A-Niang; I was hurt, but I married the man I wanted to spend the rest of my life with and had our son; that's enough.”

“No, we keep—”

“A-Die, it’s okay,” Jiang Yanli interjects, smiling from ear to ear. “It’s all in the past. I just want our family to be together again.”

Jiang Wanyin and Yu Ziyuan wished that as well, and hoped that it would happen. They were silent for a while, until Yu Ziyuan noticed her daughter fidgeting, as if she wanted to say more but was hesitant.

“A-Li, do you wish to say something?” Yu Ziyuan asked calmly, and her daughter did not respond right away. She deliberated over what she wanted to say, and when she had gathered her thoughts, she spoke.

“I only have one wish, A-Niang, A-Die.”

The Jiang Patriarch and Matriarch were perplexed but nodded anyway.

“Please do not chastise or insult A-Xian, particularly his parents. They’re good people. They, especially A-Xian, do not deserve harsh words. His actions all have reasons that will be revealed soon, so I hope you refrain from doing that,” she explained, and Yu Ziyuan tightened her grip on Jiang Fengmian's.

“We’ll try,” Jiang Fengmian assured.

“A-Niang?”

Yu Ziyuan clenched her jaw. Of course, this was her daughter’s wish. She was well aware of how much she despised that boy. Her feelings for that boy will remain the same, but if the viewing reveals some important information about his cultivation switch, she may be more forgiving. For her daughter, she will be more merciful.

“Fine,” she responded, and her daughter smiled widely.

“A-Cheng,” Jiang Fengmian called out, drawing the man's attention. His eyes were rimmed red, and his nose was red as well. “When the viewing is over, I'd like to see what you did with Lotus Pier and learn about your accomplishments. Is that okay?” he asked softly.

‘It’s more than okay,’ Jiang Wanyin's mind screamed, but he didn't respond accordingly. “It is okay.”

“Thank you, A-Cheng.”

As the Jiang Family concludes their talk, the privacy barrier dissipated. Jiang Wanyin quickly wipes his tears and composes himself before turning away from his family and returning to his place, the rest of the family following suit. Wei Wuxian and Jin Ling smiled proudly as they realized the conversation went better than expected.

Jin Ling admitted to being concerned for his uncle. He could see his uncle's body trembling and his grandfather wiping his tears earlier. He only saw his uncle cry twice, once at Guanyin Temple and once when his family returned. He wanted to stand and console him, even if it meant being chastised, but his father held him back and shook his head, signaling that he should not intervene, at least not yet, so he waited. Even his mother was crying, but she was also smiling, and he desperately wanted to know what they discussed.

Wei Wuxian, on the other hand, was feeling sad as well. He also wanted to properly speak with the Jiang Patriarch and Matriarch to mend their relationship and, if only temporarily, alleviate Madam Yu's resentment towards him. Despite the fact that he knows it will be impossible to change her mind and heart, he still hopes to get along with his foster mother in the future.

“The viewing is ready; be still and relax yourselves,” Baoshan Sanren announced loudly. The cultivators were looking forward to the next memory, which would be the archery competition. The men will definitely enjoy a lot of action, but the presence of the Wens in the memory will undoubtedly upset them.

“We’re going to see Senior Wei and Hanguang-jun with an arrow!” Zizhen cheered.

“Didn't Senior Wei win?” Jingyi asked Sizhui, who nodded.

“That's exactly what he said earlier.”

“He cheated,” Jin Ling cuts in, smirking as if his prediction will actually happen.

“I can hear you, A-Ling,” Wei Wuxian said, pouting at his nephew. “I would never cheat. Your uncle is too good to do that.”

“I beg to differ,” Jiang Wanyin interjects, sniffing at the same time. Even Lan Qiren silently agrees with him.

“Shh! It’s starting!” Cangse Sanren exclaimed excitedly.

The sun appeared, shining down on a glade surrounded by natural towering rock cliffs. Then an archery target was set up in the middle of the clearing.

A person released a heavy sigh.

“Why do all the roads in Qishan look the same?” Wei Wuxian wondered as he searched for a path to his destination. Unlike his usual black robes, Wei Wuxian was now wearing bright red and gold robes, an outfit given to them by Qishan Wen. “If only someone could point me in the right direction.”

A sound of an arrow striking the archery target caught Wei Wuxian’s attention.

Wen Ning promptly hides behind his sister, recalling this scene in his mind. Noticing this, Wen Qing raised an eyebrow and inquired, “What are you doing?”

“Nothing, jiejie!”

Wen Qing continuously stared at his brother suspiciously.

The cultivators were then allowed to see where the arrow had landed, and some of them gaped in astonishment.

“Wait, the person just hit the bull’s eye. Who was that?” Nie Mingjue inquired, eager to know the shooter.

“Huh?” Wei Wuxian attention drifted towards the person. “Forceful bowstring sound. Punctuating the air with strength. Which superb archer is this?” he wondered, moving closer to get a better look at the man.

In the middle of the field was a young boy dressed in Wen robes. His brows were creased as he focused on his intended target. He slowly raised his bow for another shot. His concentration intensified as the screen shifted to focus on the target in front of him.

“A-Ning?!” Wen Qing gaped, and the cultivators did a double take.

“Huh? What?”

“That’s the Ghost General?!” They chorused in disbelief, whipping towards the said man, and Wei Wuxian couldn't help but smile with delight. In comparison to the said man's current appearance, the Wen Ning on the screen was handsome with fine, delicate features. No one would believe this is the Ghost General if Wen Qing hadn't just confirmed it.

“So he's also good at shooting arrows!” Zizhen said, and several eyes landed Wen Ning. The said man, embarrassed and afraid of their reactions, made himself smaller behind his sister and trembled.

“Wei-gongzi is far better than me,” he denied, and Wei Wuxian grimaced, not liking the boy's lack of self-esteem.

“Aiya, we’re both good, Wen Ning!”

“Great shot!” Wei Wuxian shouted as he emerged from behind the bushes near the target.

Startled, Wen Ning screamed and shot the arrow at Wei Wuxian.

“A-Ying!” Wei Changze and Cangse Sanren exclaimed.

With a *‘woah’*, Wei Wuxian caught the arrow with his bare hand at ease.

Several cultivators were impressed with both Wen Ning’s skills and Wei Wuxian’s reflexes. Wen Qing looked proud for a split second if it weren't for the fact that she remembered how these cultivators had insulted and tried to kill their brother so many times, and now they're praising him as if they hadn't done anything wrong.

“Are we going to see you in the competition, Uncle Ning?” Sizhui asked, smiling in excitement, not bothering to glare at the cultivators.

Because he was still shy and afraid, Wen Ning took a peek to stare at his cousin and slowly shake his head. “No. I was too nervous to participate,” he responded.

“Nooooo!” Jingyi grumbled. “We want to see you compete!”

“Right,” Zizhen concurs. “We wanna see how awesome you are!”

If Wen Ning wasn't a corpse, his cheeks would have been painted red; these kids know how to make him blush. Wen Qing's heart warmed at the sight.

“What a close call!” Wei Wuxian said before looking up and grinning at Wen Ning. “Don’t be so nervous. Which young maser of Wen Clan are you? Your archery is brilliant!”

Wen Ning made a noise Wen Qing did not recognize.

“Yes!” Wei Wuxian exclaimed in agreement. “Wen Ning's archery skills are incredible!”

“W-Wei-gongzi!”

It’s kind of tragic to realize that Wen Ning’s archery skills never went anywhere. He had so much unrealized and untapped potential that he never had a chance to see to fruition He'd be one of the most talented archers of his generation. Before he died, his archery skills were one of his three defining characteristics, and Wei Wuxian was certain he missed wielding a bow and arrow.

Wei Wuxian, still smiling, continued to praise him, saying, “I’ve never seen anyone from your clan shoot so—”

“I’m sorry!” Wen Ning exclaimed and ran away from the man before him to hide behind the rock boulder.

“That’s not the Ghost General,” an elderly man insisted, shaking his head. “That can't possibly be hi—”

“What? Because he's bloodthirsty, killing machine fierce corpse?” Mianmian interjected, her fists clenched in annoyance. "Is that what you’re trying to say?”

“Well—”

“Do not explain any further,” Lan Wangji was the second one to interrupt the man, his gaze cold like a glacial winter wind. “It is insignificant.”

The disciples snorted as they saw the man's face turn red with rage.

“Your beliefs about Wen Ning are far from the truth,” Wei Wuxian spoke, expression unreadable, but he clenched his jaw again as if holding back his emotions. “In reality, he's shy, nervous, and stutters. He's one of the nicest people I know.”

The cultivators were speechless, but they remained wary. Wen Ning is almost the same as Nie Huaisang. Shy, timid, and constantly nervous, but hiding his true self behind a façade to fool everyone.

On the other hand, some cultivators cooed.

“He’s cute,” Jiang Yanli laughed delightfully.

“Huh? Do I look so handsome that he was scared away?” he asked himself, somewhat baffled by the boy’s reaction.

“I beg to differ,” Jiang Wanyin said, rolling his eyes.

“Chengcheng, I was one of the top-ranked desirable cultivators,” Wei Wuxian winked, smiling smugly. Lan Wangji inwardly felt pleased, but no one should know that, However, his husband's smile indicated that he already knew what he was feeling.

“Only because you were a flirt,” Jiang Wanyin retorted.

“You ranked fifth, Jiang Cheng, despite being angry all the time,” Wei Wuxian stated as a matter of fact.

Jiang Wanyin didn't say anything else, but he was proud to be in the top five.

With a sigh, Wei Wuxian mumbled, “Let it be,” and tossed the arrow casually with his bare hands, hitting the bull's eye despite the lack of a bow. Most cultivators would struggle to hit the target accurately even if they were powerful, skilled, or used a bow.

Once more, several cultivators were taken aback, while Wei Changze and Cangse Sanren were filled with pride. Some were also envious. It has been known that he’s a master in six arts, including archery. By now, it should come as no surprise that he easily hit the target, as he was also one of the most powerful young cultivators of their generation despite cultivating late. But because he cultivated late and became powerful and skilled in a matter of years, they were even more perplexed as to why he switched cultivation when he didn't need resentful energy to be powerful.

“Senior Wei is already good!” Sizhui praised, eyes twinkling with admiration and fondness.

“I'd pay him if he could teach me how to properly hit an arrow,” a female cultivator said, already planning how to persuade the Yiling Patriarch to teach her.

“I don't think he'd teach you,” her friend whispered, her gaze fixed on someone, and the former turned to see where she was looking and saw Lan Wangji staring at them with an unreadable expression.

Shuddering, the lady responded, “Yeah, nevermind.”

“The roads in Qishan are complicated,” he grumbled again. “Where is the archery field's entrance anyway?”

Behind the rock boulder, Wen Ning tensed slightly, then reluctantly raised his hand, pointing to the entrance to the archery field.

“T-That…” Wen Ning stuttered. “Over there.”

“Heh?” Wei Wuxian shifted his gaze to the boy's pointed hand. He saluted him with a smile. “Thank you very much! My name is Wei Ying from the Yunmeng Jiang Clan. Courtesy name is Wuxian. May I know your name, Young master?”

Wen Ning emerged from behind the boulder, and saluted as well, despite feeling nervous. “Qi-Qishan Wen Clan, Wen Ning,” he introduced and raised his head with a small smile. “Courtesy name is Qionglin.”

Nie Mingjue and Lan Qiren were beginning to suspect that they had been completely wrong about Wen Ning's character from the start.

Jin Ling blinked several times, still stunned, and asked himself, *‘Was this the same person I'd grown to despise all these years?’* Guilt hits him a second later. The fact that he despised a kind and loyal man, who did nothing wrong but protect his friend, family, and himself, made him want to punch himself.

'He had no intention of murdering your father. Someone else was controlling him,' Jin Ling's mind supplied.

Jiang Wanyin, on the other hand, was doubting himself. This man on the screen saved his life after the Lotus Pier massacre. How did his resentment towards him manifest from the start? Did his resentment begin because he is a Wen, or because he murdered his sister's husband? The answer is still unknown to him.

The memory then changed as five different flags were raised for each sect. On the field, competitors began to gather in small groups as drums began to beat loudly.

"Wei Wuxian!" Jiang Wanyin exclaimed, demanding, "Where have you been?!"

"I nearly got lost," he panted as he came to a halt in front of the massive drum bearing the Wen Sect's symbol in the center. "Woah, that is the famous Qiongqi* Horn drum! It's magnificent enough!"

(Qiongqi*—an ancient Chinese mythological fierce beast that rewards evil and punishes good.)

"Wait, it is?!" The disciples gaped.

It may seem strange that these little ones had knowledge about this, especially since it is about Qishan Wen's greatest treasure and achievement, but the older cultivators refused to let the disciples be ignorant, teaching them everything they could about the Wens without a single detail abandoned. (Or the cultivators liked to believe they knew everything despite the fact that they lacked more information.)

"It looks huge than I thought," a Jiang disciple commented, still in disbelief.

"Ignore that; I thought it looks more of a drum than a beast," Jingyi said, half disappointed.

“It's a drum, you moron. Of course, it'll look more like a drum than a beast,” Jin Ling responded, rolling his eyes. Though the drum piqued his interest.

“The drum had horns though,” Zizhen interjected, as if he hadn't already stated the obvious. Sizhui laughed lightly, amused by his friend.

“Quick, draw it!” a Nie disciple exclaimed, taking out a talisman and brush.

“Is this drum really made of Qiongqi’s skin?”

“Does that mean the legend that Wen Mao, the founder of the Wen Clan, killed Qiongqi is true?”

Some cultivators were displeased. Centuries ago, cultivators attempted but failed to exterminate the aforementioned beast. It didn't mean they stopped hunting it down. Many had gone night hunting for it, some in groups and some with armies, but the beast was cunning; it knew it was being hunted and had gone into hiding. Not only that, but it was also powerful. Cultivators could not attack it recklessly if they did not have a proper plan or alternatives in case something went wrong.

It just so happened that Wen Mao was also a powerful cultivator, perhaps on par with Wen Rouhan, that he was able to defeat the Qiongqi and rise to fame, eventually founding the Qishan Wen Clan.

Wen Qing supposed she should be proud of his ancestor for defeating such powerful beast, but she didn't know him well enough, so she felt confused about what to feel.

From afar, Jin Zixuan glared at Wei Wuxian, remembering their brawl previously, and Wei Wuxian glared back, so the former averted his gaze and walked away.

Jin Zixuan chuckled nervously as Madam Jin and Yu Ziyuan gave him an unimpressed look.

“Qiongqi is a fierce beast in the antediluvian period,” Jiang Wanyin explained calmly. “No one had seen the beast; the truth is only up to the Wen Clan's lips, but the drum... Father said it's nothing ordinary.”

Wei Wuxian laughed and ran forward, wrapping his arm around the shoulders of his third shidi. He then asks, “What? You want it?”

The boy laughed as he continued, “Rest assured! If I can find such an ancient fierce beast, I will kill it for you and make more magnificent drum!”

Not far away from them, a Lan disciple assesses the durability of the bow string multiple times, causing a light sound. This seemed to catch Wei Wuxian’s attention, so he turned around and his face beamed.

“Wangji-xiong!” Wei Wuxian called out. “When did you come?”

Lan Qiren sighed heavily. “Here he comes again; why does he bother him so much?”

Lan Xichen responded with a chuckle, “Wangji is fun to tease with, Uncle. You should try it.”

Lan Qiren gave his older nephew a stern look, which made the other laugh even harder.

Lan Wangji, of course, glared back at Wei Wuxian and walked away.

However, before the former could proceed, the latter blocked his path and laughed before whining, “Don’t ignore me Lan Zhan! At the very least, we studied together; don't be so cold!”

“Yeah, Hanguang-jun! How is Senior Wei going to know you like him if you keep ignoring him?” Jingyi complained before Zizhen slapped him and told him to shut up.

“Well, I'd like to remind you that Wangji-xiong is still repressed here,” Huaisang said, his tone laced with slight teasing. “He has no idea what to do with his emotions.”

“Huaisang is correct,” Lan Xichen agreed evenly.

Lan Wangji and Wei Wuxian couldn't help but smile at their younger selves.

Nie Mingjue, on the other hand, was perplexed as to how his brother had figured out Lan Wangji's feelings this early.

Seconds after glaring at the Jiang Head Disciple, Lan Wangji let out a heavy sigh, as if he was tired of his antics.

“Excuse me,” Lan Wangji said, and Wei Wuxian looked a bit surprised before cheerfully grinning once more and stepping back, sweeping his arm to let the other pass.

As soon as Lan Wangji was a safe distance away, Wei Wuxian smirked mischievously and exclaimed, “Lan Zhan~~, Your forehead ribbon is slanted~”

Lan Wangji's hand slapped his forehead immediately to check.

The real Lan Wangji instinctively raised his head to his forehead to check if his ribbon was crooked. Though he does not mind if it is. The action made the Lan family and Wei Wuxian laugh.

“Don’t worry, A-Zhan, it’s straight,” Madam Lan reassured with a smile.

‘Except your son isn't,’ Wuxian's mind added, giggling.

Realizing that his ribbon was perfectly fine, Lan Wangji turned and glared menacingly at Wei Wuxian, who was laughing. He remained motionless until he decided to ignore him and marched away while the other continued to laugh.

“So shameless,” Madam Jin mumbled, smiling fondly at the head disciple's antics. Her son desperately needs a friend like Wei Wuxian to tease and play with. It's unfortunate that her son did not have this experience as a child and was instead raised under the pressures of an arranged marriage and training to be a sect leader. Would her son be more playful and less arrogant if he was friends with Wei Wuxian from the start? Would her son tease her, only to have her tease him back?

Madam Jin's heart clenched just thinking about it. She wanted it to happen, but her son is now an adult and a father. He doesn't have time to be playful.

Meanwhile, Yu Ziyuan looked disapprovingly at the laughing Wei Wuxian. Why was one boy teasing the other and not worrying about the competition? Everything that boy thinks is causing trouble and teasing others. He is never serious!

There was some time before the competition began, and the competitors were at the empty field where Wei Wuxian had become lost. He then saw the person he was looking for and, as if recalling something important, yelled out again, “Wangji-xiong! Wangji-xiong!”

“Why are you calling him again?!” Lan Qiren grumbled, irritated that the boy was going to tease his nephew again.

“Calm down, Qiren,” Qingheng-jun said placing his hand on his shoulder while the corner of his lips quirk up.

On a rock cliff was Lan Wangji. The gust of wind blew his hair back gracefully. When he heard the same boy calling him, he looked down and saw Wei Wuxian, whose face was as bright as the sun.

“Wangji-xiong!” he exclaimed once more, waving his hand.

Lan Wangji glared and turned away.

“Huh?” Wei Wuxian blinked, baffled.

The cultivators snorted.

“Why are you confused?” Jiang Wanyin asked exasperatedly. “He's constantly ignoring you.”

“You’re wrong, A-Cheng!” Wei Wuxian protested. “He's just a little shy! Right, Lan Zhan?”

“Mn.”

“Ah, these two are so cute,” Cangse Sanren giggled.

Concealing his confusion with a laugh, Wei Wuxian moved under the ledge where the second jade stood.

Wei Wuxian was obstinate, and escape seemed impossible at this point, so Lan Wangji sighed and inquired, “What is it?”

Wei Wuxian smirked and reached into his qiankun pocket, pulling out a gift.

“Awwww,” all female cultivators cooed while Wei Wuxian and Lan Wangji blushed.

“So that’s why our shidi’s said you bought a gift before departing,” Jiang Wanyin smirked, amused by the sight of his brother and his brother-in-law’s flushed cheeks. “That was intended for Lan Wangji.”

“How sweet of you, A-Xian,” Jiang Yanli cheered.

Lan Wangji jumped off the cliff as Wei Wuxian presented him the gift. “I was away last year and missed your birthday,” he explained,” he explained. “So I specifically got you a gift today.”

Jiang Wanyin huffed, “How the hell did you remember his birthday but not where you put your underwear?”

“Jiang Cheng!” Wei Wuxian exclaimed, the red on his cheeks deepening.

“What?!” he exclaimed back.

“There was no need to bring that up!” he chastised, ignoring the laughs in the background.

“That was a genuine inquiry!”

“It was not! You’re teasing me!”

“Wei Wuxian! Jiang Cheng!” Yu Ziyuan yelled, irritated that the two began screaming at each other again.

The brothers clamped their mouths shut, while Cangse Sanren and Wei Changze gave her an unreadable stare.

As Lan Wangji passed Wei Wuxian, he responded, "It's not necessary."

"Eh?!" Wei Wuxian exclaimed, his eyes widening in surprise. He remained in this state until he recovered and pursued the other.

"Don't be so cold," Wei Wuxian said, trailing behind the second jade. "I worked extremely hard on it. I had no idea you had never read it."

"Don't tell me he's going to give him—" Nie Mingjue trailed off, Wen Qing beside him sighed exasperatedly.

Lan Wangji turned around to face him, and Wei Wuxian quickly reached into his qiankun pocket again, smirking as he said, "It's an entry-level one this time. You can definitely accept it."

"He's not going to accept that," Jiang Fengmian mumbled, sighing fondly, already having an idea of what his next gift would be.

Wei Wuxian then proudly presented the second jade a book of *'Entry-Level Erotic Depictions with tips for love'*

"I knew it," Jiang Wanyin and Nie Huaisang chorused.

"Oh my god, why Wei Wuxian?!" exclaimed some cultivators, causing the said man to laugh.

"So shameless!"

“Where did he even get that book from?”

Lan Qiren was so tempted to strangle the boy for giving his nephew such a thing.

Lan Wangji sneered at the book, his brows twitching, before turning away with a scoff. “Boring.”

Despite their pink cheeks, the disciples laughed at their Hanguang-jun's predictable reaction. Their regard for their Senior Wei for giving that to Hanguang-jun increased.

“Eh? You don’t like it?” Wei Wuxian asked, genuinely baffled by the second jade's refusal. Regardless, he refused to give up and smiled determinedly. This time, he took out a dish filled with red chili oil and powder.

“I also brought you a specialty of Yunmeng, Spicy Mantis Shrimps!”

“He can’t eat that!” Sizhui exclaimed, concerned. The last time he saw Lan Wangji eat a delicacy laced with chili powder, he choked several times, and he had to bring a lot of water to dilute the heat on his tongue.

“Like anyone could take that,” Jiang Wanyin said, cringing slightly. “I'd rather eat charred meat than that.”

“No one truly has the same taste as me,” Wei Wuxian cries dramatically, clutching his chest as if deeply wounded.

“Or this calligraphy I wrote, hee-hee,” he said, holding up a scroll with a drawing of Lan Wangji and the words *‘Lan Wangji is so attractive!’* written on it.

“Is this even giving gifts for a missed birthday anymore?” Song Lan asked, Song Lan asked, huffing, which sounded like an amused laugh. “This feels like giving courtship gifts.”

Wei Wuxian's entire face burned. Looking at it, it did appear as if he was obliviously giving Lan Wangji courtship gifts.

“And he seemed oblivious about it,” Mianmian pointed out, smirking like it was necessary to say it.

“And he seemed to use the missed birthday as an excuse,” Xiao Xingchen added, smiling sweetly, but to Wei Wuxian, he looked like Lan Xichen, subtly teasing him.

“Lan Zhan,” he whispered. “They’re teasing me.”

Lan Wangji responded with a smile and hum tinged with deep affection.

“Hey, Lan Zhan, talk to me,” Wei Wuxian requested, again blocking the other's path. “Which one do you like?”

“Are you sure you aren’t in love with Hanguang-jun at that time?” Jin Ling asked exasperatedly.

“He’s dumb A-Ling,” Jiang Wanyin stated unequivocally.

“A-Cheng.”

“Sorry, A-Jie.”

Eyebrows twitching once more, Lan Wangji raised his arrow and aimed it at the Jiang disciple. Instantaneously, Wei Wuxian’s face morphed into a panicked look.

“Ah! If you like none of them, I’ll get you something else!”

“How many gifts did you even prepare?” Wen Qing raised a brow, amused that Wei Wuxian was serious about giving his husband a gift.

“Looking at how many he pulled out from his qiankun pocket, I’d say a lot,” Lan Xichen responded, laughing as he noticed his brother's ears were red.

Lan Wangji released the arrow.

The encounter between Wei Wuxian and Wen Ning demonstrated that the former could catch the arrow if he so desired, but his response to Lan Wangji's attack this time was to simply duck down, dramatically screaming, “Help! Lan Zhan is trying to kill me!”

Yu Ziyuan and Jiang Fengmian simultaneously sighed. The former irritably pinched the bridge of her nose, embarrassed by the boy's antics, while the latter simply huffed in amusement.

After blinking and pausing for a moment, the Jiang Head Disciple turned to look back to where the arrow had landed, only to notice that the archery target was behind him.

“Lan-er-gongzi hit the bull’s-eye!” exclaimed the announcer.

This did not come as a surprise to the cultivators, but that did not mean they were not impressed. Like Lan Wangji’s swordsmanship skills, his archery skills are also top-notched, despite the fact that the Gusu Lan Sect does not focus much on archery.

The Lan family and a few other cultivators proudly smiled at the said man. Their regard for him intensified.

Wei Wuxian stared at the target for a moment before his face lit up as if he had suddenly come up with a brilliant idea.

“I don’t like that look,” Jiang Wanyin mumbled.

Several minutes had passed, Lan Wangji was once again aiming his arrow to take another shot, his sole focus on the target, when an arrow flew by from directly behind him, severing the second jade's previous arrow in half.

“Wei-gongzi hit the bull’s eye!”

“The competition hasn't even begun yet,” Madam Jin said, slightly shaking her head. “And they're already competing against one another.”

Lan Wangji spun around and exclaimed, “Wei Ying!”

With a smirk on his lips, Wei Wuxian smugly responded, “What? The target is not yours alone; why can't I shoot at it?”

“Whatever.”

Jin Zixuan huffs and says, “I can't believe I'm saying this, but you two are adorable, so perfect for each other.”

Wei Wuxian promptly flinches, “Oh, that was cringy coming from you. What did you eat, Jin Zixuan?”

“I just awoke from the dead. I ate nothing but contaminated air.”

Lan Wangji did not hesitate to shoot again, his arrow hitting another target.

“Lan-er-gongzi hit the—”

Wei Wuxian shoots, severing the second jade's previous arrow in half.

“Wei-gongzi hit the bull’s eye!”

Lan Wangji shoots again.

“Lan-er-gongzi hit the bull’s eye!”

Wei Wuxian shoots again.

“Wei-gongzi hit the bull’s eye!”

“Alright, stop now, the competition hasn't even begun!” Wei Changze reminded, only to realize his words would go unheard.

Madam Jin sighed, crossing her arms. “That's exactly what I said.”

“Go, my little, A-Ying!” Cangse Sanren cheered loudly.

“Lan-er-gongzi hit the bull’s eye! Wei-gongzi hit the bull’s eye! Lan-er-gongzi hit the bull’s eye! Wei-gongzi hit the bull’s eye—”

“Oh my god, stop!”

“What is even happening?!”

“They’re so good. How is that even possible?”

“Go Senior Wei! Go Hanguang-jun!”

“Lan-er-gongzi hit the bull’s eye! Wei-gongzi hit the bull’s eye! Lan-er-gongzi hit the bull’s eye! Wei-gongzi hit the bull’s eye! Lan-er-gongzi hit the bull’s eye! Wei-gongzi hit the bull’s eye!.....Hit, hit, hit…they both hit it!”

“That poor announcer though,” A-Qing lamented.

“Someone better had paid him well. That man's job is too exhausting,” Nie Huaisang said, also pitying the man. Though his job is probably the easiest of the bunch.

Lan Wangji and Wei Wuxian stared in amusement at their younger selves. They were really show-offs before and they did not know about it.

While the demonstration of skills impressed the others, Jiang Wanyin couldn't help but feel envious. He shouldn't be feeling this way, especially since this happened so long ago, but he couldn't help himself. He had worked hard to outperform his brother, even training secretly in the woods to hone his skills, but as always, he could not manage to do so. He had been trained to shoot for almost his entire life, whereas his brother had cultivated and trained late and still managed to be better than him, so much better that instead of seeking him, all of his shidi’s in the sect would run to his brother for additional archery training. Being the Jiang heir, he felt so pathetic and utterly humiliated.

After noticing his son's expression, Yu Ziyuan scowled. *'Show off, he's fucking showing off,'* she thought distastefully. Wei Wuxian had always outperformed her son despite his lack of restraint and decorum. She had always been aware of the boy's exceptional skills, but she refused to acknowledge them, and even now she still refuses to acknowledge them.

After nearly an hour, all four targets were filled with arrows, the feathers arranged in a similar manner to bouquets, and each one perfectly pierced the bull's eye.

Wei Wuxian stared at the arrows admiringly. “Wow! These bouquets are really well-arranged! Your arrows and mine blended in so well!” He winks.

Mianmian sighed exasperatedly. “He's even unaware that he's flirting.”

“Like I said, he’s dumb,” Jiang Wanyin replied nonchalantly.

“Mianmian, Jiang Cheng, I can hear you, you know!”

“We know,” the two chorused.

Lan Wangji tightened his grip on his bow, his glare deepening as he responded, “You had it in for me,” before he stormed off.

Once again, Wei Wuxian appeared in front of Lan Wangji, refusing to let the man go just yet. “Because you didn't accept my gifts, I had no choice but to do this.”

“You—”

Wei Wuxian then held out one of the feather bouquets and presented it to the second jade. “Here's your birthday gift,” he said, and Lan Wangji's face turned shocked as if she hadn't expected such a thing. “Lan Zhan, do you like it?”

Bathed in the morning light, Wei Wuxian tilted his head and smiled ethereally, as he had done since he was a child. His entire being radiated with an innocent, youthful glow that seemed to intensify each second. Lan Wangji’s expression, on the other hand,

remained shocked, but his face and ears, without a doubt, gained color, his pale skin painted like a beautiful red rose. Flustered, the second jade turned away. The wind then picks up, gracefully brushing their hair back. The languid movement of the leaves and flowers in the air added to the beauty of the scene.

“Oh my god, this is so—”

“Beautiful!”

“Too adorable!”

The female cultivators and disciples squealed unbelievably loud, whereas Wei Wuxian planted his face against his husband's neck, cheeks flushed with embarrassment, Lan Wangji smiled widely, much to everyone's surprise.

“God, you two are seriously disgusting,” Jiang Wanyin remarked, rolling his eyes. Of course, he wasn't serious; he was just teasing, but he did get a light slap from his sister.

“Who knew you were unconsciously romantic, A-Ying,” Cangse Sanren smirked, liking the way his son was so flustered, but the sight did make her happy. It also reminded her of how Wei Changze had lavished her with gifts in the past in order to win her heart, and how he had the same reaction with his son.

“Stop teasing him, Cangse. Look at how red his face is,” Wei Changze says calmly, offering a smile to his son-in-law, who is now stroking his son's hair.

The chatter abruptly came to an end when an old man scowled. “Are we just here to eat more dog food? I’d rather get out of here.”

Many people, particularly the Lan and Wei families, were enraged by the man's words.

The old man's friend then retorted. “Right, I thought we were going to see the archery competition. Why are we watching this instead? Cut-sleeves make me puke.”

Many of them clenched their fists in response to the insulting remark, but the couple was unconcerned. Instead, Wei Wuxian smirked and twirled a strand of his hair, saying, “If you think you're going to puke, don't deep throat too much then.”

The cultivators whipped their heads at him, gawking at the filthy response. Jingyi was so tempted to just simply clap and shout without worrying about getting scolded later.

“Nice one, A-Ying! You are definitely my son!” Cangse Sanren cheered, but that did not mean she stopped glaring at the man.

“At this point, the Immortal might as well kick them out,” Jin Zixuan mumbled. “Those remarks were superfluous.”

“You’re right, Jin-gongzi,” Baoshan Sanren's voice echoed throughout the temple, prompting them to look at her with anxiousness as they suddenly felt a surge of strong spiritual power on the verge of bursting out. “Homophobic men should not be tolerated in my temple,” she added casually. Like what she did to a cultivator earlier, hurling a torrent of spiritual energy at the two men, screaming for a minute until the golden energy dissipated. The two are no longer there.

“There, I kick him out. If any of you make another homophobic comment, I will do the same thing I did just now, but the pain will be three times worse,” Baoshan Sanren said, her face devoid of emotion. The cultivators shivered under her cold stare as if they'd been caught in a heavy blizzard, unable to find shelter for warmth.

“She’s so cool,” Jin Ling gaped, his eyes twinkling in admiration.

“There was no need for you to do that, Grandmaster. I'm prepared to take a few more insults —”

“Absolutely not,” Wei Changze stated sternly, “Cangse’s Grandmaster did the right thing. You both did not deserve to hear that.”

“Yes, he’s right.” Qingheng-jun concurs and looks at his second son and offers a smile. The desire to protect his son from these cultivators grew stronger.

Still feeling flustered, Lan Wangji mumbled a soft, “Boring.”

The sound of rumbling drum beats instantaneously destroyed the romantic air between the two, indicating the commencement of the competition. Left with no choice, Lan Wangji accepted the gift, much to Wei Wuxian's delight, and place it inside his qiankun pouch.

“Oh, it’s starting,” Jingyi’s body was shaking in excitement, wondering how many cool scenes he'd see in this memory.

A Lan disciple then wondered, “Can we get a glimpse of the previous Wen Clan Sect Leader?”

“I'd rather see Ghost General dominate this competition,” a Jiang disciple protested quietly.

“Lanling Jin Clan,” A Wen announcer stated. “Yunmeng Jiang Clan, Qinghe Nie Clan Leaders, Gusu Lan Clan, Lan Qiren have arrived. Please take a seat!”

All of the disciples from each sect stood in rows, perfectly straight as the four sect leaders walked through the middle path. The one walking ahead of the four with his head held high was Nie Mingjue.

This man’s appearance really gives them the impression that he is ready to erupt in rage at any moment, but the cultivators knew that was just how he looked, but in this scene, he did look like he would erupt in rage if provoked. They understood him; he was about to face the *'Wen Ruohan,'* whom he despises the most. Almost everyone, to be precise.

The disciples all agreed not to enrage Nie Mingjue. The man is terrifying, and his expression on the screen screams *'don't anger me or I'll cut you off into pieces.'*

Both Jiang Wanyin and Wei Wuxian smiled, turning their heads to gaze at the passing sect leaders. The leaders marched up the stairs, coming to a halt only when Nie Mingjue paused. He then frowned at the seats that had been laid out for them, and finally looked up to where Wen Ruohan was about to sit. The arrangement of the seats really states who the superior leader is among the leaders.

Most sect leaders in the temple were staring at the elevated position where the Wen Sect Leader was to sit. The audacity of that man. Even Baoshan Sanren was not pleased. He wasn't even immortal *'yet'*, but he was already abusing his power, which was in stark contrast to the first leader and founder of the Wen Sect, who despises abuse of power and fame. What would have happened if Wen Ruohan had achieved immortality?

Nie Mingjue scowled and clenched his fists. He wants to enter the screen and kill the man, but this was only a memory, so he muttered a series of curses.

"Da-ge, calm down. You're fueling Baxia's resentment with yours," Nie Huaisang pleaded, so Nie Mingjue forced himself to calm his breathing. In his corner, he could see Lan Xichen and Jiang Fengmian's worried expressions, yet he did not spare them a glance.

Nie Mingjue flicked his sleeves as he furiously turned around to walk away.

Then, Lan Qiren spoke evenly, "Clan Leader Nie, please calm down."

"The four clans and the Wen Clan used to be distinguished only by host and guest, who sat in the same row. Now this one from Wen Clan has already thought of himself as the head!" Nie Mingjue viciously pointed out.

"He's so arrogant and power-hungry, he got the same fate as his son," a female cultivator snorted.

Her friend immediately responded, “And why did he even try to separate his seat from the four clan leaders? To display his power? It's quite funny considering his sect lost this competition.”

“How embarrassing,” some cultivators muttered.

“Wen Ruohan has honed his formidable arts and subdued three clans in Beijiang,” Lan Qiren reminded firmly. “Even long-established cultivation clans are affiliated to it. With such overwhelming power, of course they wouldn’t sham gestures of politeness.”

Nie Mingjue scoffed. “Very well! I'm sick of pretending to be pleasant as well.” He started walking down the stairs when Lan Qiren held out his arm to stop him.

“Clan Leader Nie, calm down. I know you've wanted to avenge your father for years, but the Wen Clan has a stronger foundation. Their methods of suppressing dissent are also brutal. You must exercise restraint for the sake of the Nie Clan,” he explained thoroughly.

The cultivators, particularly the disciples from Lan Clan had already known how terrifying their Grandmaster is and how high restraint can be, but his display of great restraint here, his calm speech and political mentality, astounded them; he even stopped Nie Mingjue from storming off that would’ve endangered his clan.

Qingheng-jun and Cangse Sanren secretly sent an approving smile to the man.

Yu Ziyuan imagined herself in her husband's shoes, wondering if she could ever be calm in the presence of Wen Rouhan. Even if Lan Qiren tries to restrain her, she knew she would rather have an argument with the Wen Sect Leader than demonstrate false politeness and sincerity. Perhaps his husband's gentle and calm demeanor was both a benefit and a liability to him.

Behind Nie Mingjue, Jin Guangshan was already seated as he laughed and said, “I agree. Clan Leader Nie, why get angry? Why not take a seat and drink?”

Jin Ling was somehow stunned to see his grandfather again when he shouldn’t, given that he was the Sect Leader at the time, but as soon as he was reminded of his grandfather's crimes, his hands curled into fists and he glared at him. It was safe to say that being Jin Guangshan's grandson was an embarrassment. He would never claim him as his grandfather, even if his parents tells him otherwise. Jin Zixuan and Jiang Yanli became aware of this and drew their son closer to them.

“You can be angry at him, A-Ling,” Jiang Yanli said, drawing circles on his son’s back. “But don't give your grandfather that look. It's impolite.”

“It’s not like he can see his grandson glaring at him,” Madam Jin interjected. “Let him glare all he wants.”

Jin Ling was so tempted to know his grandmother, but he'll do that later.

As Nie Mingjue scoffed again and approached his seat, Jiang Fengmian approached his spot as well and said, “In the current situation, does the position of our seats make a difference?” he asked serenely, moving his gaze to the vacant seat across from them before sitting down. “The matter I’m more curious about is that except Wen Ruohan, who else will sit above us?”

“With only five clans present at the competition, what sect leader will sit there?” a Nie disciple inquired curiously.

“Someone horrible,” Wen Qing responded, her body stiffening for a fraction of a second before her brother grabs her hand.

“Is it a Wen Clan member, maiden Wen?” Jingyi asked, turning to Wen Qing.

Wen Qing simply nodded. “It is.”

“Please take a seat, Wen-er-gongzi!” said the Wen announcer again, drawing everyone's attention.

Wei Wuxian flinched so hard when he heard the name *'Wen Chao',* even his mother and father noticed.

“A-Ying, what’s wrong?” Cangse Sanren inquired, her voice tinged with concern.

“Nothing, Mother,” he reassured them, but his parents knew otherwise. They made a mental note to remember that name as it would be significant later.

Jiang Wanyin and Lan Wangji clenched their fists, knowing exactly why Wei Wuxian reacted in that manner. This was the man who started it all. Both men were desperate to enter the screen and torture the man right there and then for hurting and throwing Wei Wuxian to the Burial Mounds. Jiang Wanyin wanted to reach out to his brother, who was trying so hard to remain calm, but he knew his brother was wailing on the inside and needed someone to comfort him, but there was Lan Wangji beside him, drawing him closer as if he didn't want the other to slip through his fingers and whispering comforting words to him.

Jiang Wanyin only hoped his brother would be okay, even if he couldn't console him.

With a smug smirk, Wen Chao marched up the stairs and walked towards his seat. He looked over at the leaders and saluted them in a disrespectful, careless manner that was ruder than Jin Zixuan’s insults.

Jin Zixuan couldn't decide whether to laugh or cry.

“Ugh, he looks ugly,” the female cultivators grumbled, their faces contorted in disgust. “Why does he look like that?

“And the audacity to give a disrespectful salute!” the disciples chorused.

Yu Ziyuan, Madam Jin, and Nie Mingjue were certain their faces had turned bright red from anger. That kid isn't even as powerful as his father, yet he acts like he's some sort of god or something.

Nie Mingjue gave an irritated smirk and said, “Clan Leader Jiang, are you satisfied with this revelation?”

Instead of being enraged, Jiang Fengmian only smiled and nodded once.

Below the field, Jiang Wanyin began to express his displeasure, saying, “This Wen Chao punk really thinks of himself as the young leader of cultivation clans.”

Those who got to interact with Wen Chao knew this statement was true, looking back in time when he led the attack on Lotus Pier and caused the majority of the deaths commanded by his father.

If Lan Wangji has to say, he’d rather deal Wen Xu’s ruthlessness than deal with Wen Chao’s shitty personality, but if Wen Chao was alive right now, he would gladly deal with his death for causing pain to his husband.

Feeling the same sentiment from his brother, Wei Wuxian scoffed and said, “This sitting arrangement symbolizes exactly that!”

Lan Qiren frowned as he drank, remarking, “The system and rites have collapsed. It’s a harbinger of chaos!” and slammed his cup against the table.

The drum beats returned, causing ripples in each leader's cup, and the announcer reappeared to finally announce the last leader.

“All hail the Clan Leader, Wen Ruohan!”

All the cultivators began to tense up, while the disciples were anticipating as they were finally going see the man the cultivation world despised. It had been years since they last saw the chief cultivator, and it was fortunate that some of them were forgetting what he looked like, but now they have been allowed to look at him again from this memory, and all the hidden resentment for the man once again resurfaced.

Jiang Fengmian's smile faded as Wen Ruohan took his seat, ignoring the ugly looks he got from other sect leaders. While the other sect leaders became tense, Jin Guangshan's lips formed a wide smile, pleased by the presence of the Excellency. Though a moment later, his smile faltered once he noticed the other sect leaders’ reactions and began fanning himself.

Jin Zixuan and Madam Jin couldn’t help but scowl, embarrassed by Jin Guangshan's enthusiasm for the presence of the chief cultivator. They were well aware of Jin Guangshan's admiration for Wen Ruohan. He either idolizes him, wishes to form an alliance with him, or wishes to surpass him. The mother and son assumed it is the second option as Jin Guangshan is also a coward. He’s extremely terrified of upsetting the chief cultivator and attempts to befriend him in order to ensure perhaps the clan or his own safety.

“I really want to punch him,” Madam Jin grumbled as she stared coldly at her husband.

The moment Wen Ruohan sat down, sophisticated yet arrogant, the entire Wen Sect dropped to their knees to salute, “The mighty and illustrious Clan Leader Wen! May you live as long as heaven and earth, shine brilliantly as the sun and the moon!”

Yu Ziyuan couldn’t contain her anger and hissed, “What is he, a God?”

“His disciples worship him a little too much,” Xiao Xingchen pointed out, frowning.

“It is precisely because he was on the verge of achieving immortality that they worship him like a God,” Lan Qiren explained, trying not to show his displeasure on his face, but it seems he failed seeing how his brother is looking at him strangely.

Jiang Wanyin scoffed, envious that the said man had accomplished so much. “Good thing he was killed before he became one then.”

Lan Xichen and Nie Mingjue then sighed as they remembered the man who killed Wen Ruohan. The three of them would've made good sworn brothers if the other wasn’t such a snake to begin with.

Jiang Wanyin and Wei Wuxian exchanged displeased glances before saluting

“All rise.”

“Why can’t we see his face?”

“Shut up, Jingyi!”

The Wen announcer bowed respectfully to his leader. On the other hand, Wen Chao smirked up at his father as the announcer resumed speaking.

“Xuan Zheng, year of Ji Mao, Qishan Discussion Conference, the Archery Competition starts now! Release the formation!” The announcer ordered, and behind the rows of disciples, the barrier starts breaking down. “There are over 1000 targets in the stone forest. 100 of which are possessed by feral ghosts. He who hits the most Feral Ghost Targets wins. Those who shot the wrong target or off target will exit the match as signaled by dark flares. Enter!”

They might not be in the competition, but they were buzzing with excitement. Today, they were about to witness each disciple's greatness and uniqueness. Lan Wangji and Wei Wuxian

were guaranteed to earn a spot on the top five winners, but they were also anticipating who would round out the list.

“I’m sure father won, right?” Jin Ling inquired, turning to face his father.

“Hmm,” Jin Zixuan paused, his hand on his chin, before cracking a smile. “Third place?”

Jin Ling's mouth slightly gaped. His rank was not bad; in fact, it was good. Given the presence of the Gusu Lan Twin Jades, it's no surprise that both brothers will be ranked first and second. Aside from that, he discovered that his father was also proficient in archery. This must be why his uncle taught him to use both a sword and a bow and arrows.

Wen Chao sipped his tea before casting a glance down the field and nearly spitting it out.

“Hold on!” Wen Chao said, making another Wen disciple from the last line to flinch. “What’s his name again?” he demanded.

The disciple looked back at Wen Chao. It was Wen Ning.

Sizhui frowned. Even Wen Chao's first appearance irritated him. This man's arrogance was on another level, even worse than Jin Ling's father's. He even wondered what would it be like to live in the same clan as him and clenched his fists. He would rather leave the sect with his family than be around the man’s vicinity.

“The last one—” Wen Chao couldn't finish his sentence before a middle-aged Wen servant came over to whisper the answer.

“Wen Ning.”

“Right, Wen Ning. Why is he there?” he demanded, not even attempting to hide his displeasure. “His ancestry is so remote that he's barely a Wen. Who let him in? Take a look at him. Is he even capable of drawing a bow?”

Wen Qing made every effort not to scowl at Wen Chao. If only she could slit his neck and stomach to her heart's content then her heart would finally rest. Her brother was good. It was safe to say that he will be the last person to be unable to draw a bow.

“Jie, you’re scowling,” Wen Ning whispered and then trembled when her sister glared at him in return.

“Get him out of there before he brings disgrace upon our Wen Clan!” Wen Chao commanded.

Wen Qing's nose flared in rage, and tried to walk towards the screen when her arm was grabbed.

“Jie,” Wen Ning whispered shaking his head.

Getting angry was even pointless at this point. Wen Qing knew she couldn't punch or yell at the man, so she forced herself to calm down. To her right, Sizhui looked at her aunt in concern, but Wen Qing ruffled her cousin's hair before returning her gaze to the screen.

Jiang Wanyin scoffed. “If there’s a person who will bring disgrace to their clan, it is him. Fucking bastard.”

“A-Cheng,” Jiang Fengmian and Jiang Yanli chorused, making Jiang Wanyin avoid eye contact.

“Who said that he cannot draw a bow?”

“Senior Wei!” the disciples cheered.

“Yes, defend him!” some female cultivators exclaimed.

Wen Ning's eyes widened in surprise as he turned to face Wei Wuxian, his eyes vulnerable. Wei Wuxian walked confidently towards Wen Ning, his head held high.

“He can, and his archery is excellent!”

Wen Ning would have blushed right now if he could, but instead he gave Wei Wuxian a shy smile and the other returned a full smile at him.

It was one thing to be good at archery, but it was quite another to be praised and have your abilities recognized by another great archer. If Wei Wuxian deems Wen Ning is good, then he is good, and based on what they've seen so far, the cultivators could agree, even if some of them didn't like how Wen Ning was skilled before transforming into a fierce corpse.

“Can you train us Uncle Ning?” Sizhui politely asked. Beside him, Jingyi and Zizhen were giving puppy eyes at the man, as if begging him to agree, but as much as Wen Ning wanted to, he was hesitant. He hadn't drawn a bow in years and he may not be as good as before, but Wei Wuxian was looking at him with an encouraging smile.

Might as well try..

“Okay.”

“Yesss!”

“And you are Wei Wuxian?” Wen Chao inquired. Then he proceeds to say, “I hear your archery is quite good.”

Wei Wuxian smirked and crossed his arms, saying, “Good enough for hunting some pheasants~”

The cultivators were no longer surprised by his childish response, but they did wonder if that was how he usually responded to praises or if he was just trying to tease the other. In any case, rousing Wen Chao this early in the competition with the presence of his father was not a good idea. Yu Ziyuan couldn’t help but glare at the head disciple.

Jin Zixuan, irritated, remarked, “Good enough to shoot your head with his bare hands.”

“Your faith in me is frightening,” Wei Wuxian responded, baffled and cringing. “Are you even Jin Zixuan?”

“Shut up, Wei Wuxian.”

Wen Chao scoffed mockingly. “Then you should be careful today. Our Qishan’s feral ghost targets, unlike the stupid pheasants of Yunmeng, won’t just stand there and let you shoot at them.”

“You should be careful too,” Jingyi said smugly, “because Zewu-jun, Hanguang-jun, and Senior Wei are literally there to win”

“Yeah!”

Lan Xichen and Wei Wuxian smiled at the disciples while Lan Wangji’s expression softened.

“I’m looking forward to seeing you two win,” Madam Lan whispered. Knowing how this competition ended, Lan Xichen turned to his brother with an empathic smile. Wei Wuxian heard her and scratched the back of his neck sheepishly.

Jiang Fengmian drank his tea calmly, clearly unbothered by Wen Chao's words, and because he was also unconcerned, he did not issue any command to silence his head disciple.

Yu Ziyuan glared at her husband. “How do you stay calm in this situation?! Look at him, he’s trying to—”

“If you're going to say my son is attempting to destroy your clan's reputation, I suggest you stop there, Yu-furen,” Wei Changze interjected. “My son did nothing wrong that’s why Fengmian is unconcerned. If anything, we should worry more about Wen-er-gongzi.”

Yu Ziyuan was about to respond when Jiang Yanli stared at her and shake her head as if she was reminding her of her earlier wish. She threw a glare at Wei Changze and Cangse Sanren before clenching her fists and averting her gaze.

Despite the implied insult, Wei Wuxian maintained his smile. Behind him, Wen Ning shrunk himself even smaller, trying to make himself unnoticeable to others.

“Wen Ning!”

The aforementioned boy flinched.

“Why is he flinching so much? Wen Chao isn’t even doing anything to him yet,” an old man complained, earning a slew of dirty looks. Wen Qing glared at the man, while Wen Ning ensured that his sister wouldn't do anything to him. He can take it. He has heard worse insults than this. It does not affect him, but he worries for his family.

His friend sneered. “And how did he survive during the Sunshot Campaign? Did he even have the guts to fight at all?”

Wen Ning despises fighting. He’s not fit in the middle of a battlefield; he does not raise his sword to kill others, nor his bow to pierce another body. Because of his gentle and nervous

nature, he'd rather secretly harness his archery skills, improve his medical skills, and assist his sister. He only survived the Sunshot campaign because his sister was their Clan Leader's favorite, and that ensured his safety for a bit.

Wei Wuxian's dark glare remained between the two cultivators. "Why does it bother you that he flinches too much?"

"He's a cultivator!" the man responded viciously. "He's supposed to fight with valor and toughness!"

"He is indeed a cultivator," Wei Wuxian said, his eyes slightly darkening with irritation. "But I'll tell you something: Wen Ning might not have been able to fight you before, but you won't be able to fight him now."

"Yeah!" Zizhen concurs enthusiastically. "Not even the fierce corpse Song Lan could compete with the Ghost General!"

Song Lan might have flinched at the mention of his name.

"And even in Guanyin Temple he fought with the previous Nie Sect Leader and protected Sect Leader Jiang and A-Ling!" Jingyi added, crossing his arms as if daring the man to speak.

"And those two were fierce corpses, twice as strong as both of you, and you say he lacks the guts to fight?" Sizhui inquired solemnly, his ever-present smile already faltering since those two spouted some nonsense. "He can snap your heads and limbs in half, you know?"

Wen Qing was practically smiling at this point. She felt relieved that there were some people, unbelievably teenagers, who are willing to protect her brother.

"He's a fierce corpse!" the former insisted. "Of course he's going to defeat us, but—"

“There you have it, you have your answer,” Nie Huaisang interjected, fanning himself. “Why are you still explaining?”

Both men scowled, their faces red with rage, but with the immortal's cold gaze, they shrank, afraid of experiencing the same pain that the other cultivator felt after she kicked him out earlier.

“Your archery is good?” Wen Chao inquired. “Shoot an arrow for us to see then.”

Wen Ning then drew back an arrow and aimed it at the target. However, because of the pressure and the number of the audience watching him, his arms began to shake frantically.

Wen Qing bit her lip in anxiousness.

Lan Xichen observed the boy. His position was good and consistent. With great concentration and accurate trajectory, the arrow would undoubtedly hit the bull’s eye.

‘Concentrate. Don’t mind the crowd,’ he said inwardly.

Instead of concentrating on his aim and watching the target, he was preoccupied with the distrustful Wen disciples around him. Surely, with no audience pressuring him would he be able to collect himself and shoot the target accurately.

“Relax,” Wei Wuxian cheerily advised. “Weren’t you doing quite well back then?”

The unexpected advice from Wei Wuxian startled Wen Ning that he released the arrow, completely missing the target.

Many cultivators snorted, fully expecting this to occur. Wei Wuxian really put his own reputation on the line just for Wen Ning to have another chance, and Wen Ning blew it. Not

only did he embarrass Wei Wuxian, but he also embarrassed Wen Ruohan, who—until now—still hadn't made a comment about the boy. Wen Ruohan probably didn't care if Wen Ning embarrassed him, or perhaps he chose not to say anything or do anything as he was the brother of Wen Qing.

"You did great, Uncle Ning," Sizhui whispered to his side with a smile so similar to the rising sun that Wen Ning couldn't help but incline his head. He can't smile in return anyway.

"Thank you."

"That boy. His skills are remarkable, and his earlier stance was excellent. If he had a little more confidence, I'm sure he would've nailed it," Cangse Sanren muttered solemnly, and Wei Changze nodded.

Instantaneously, Wen Chao snorted and doubled over, mockingly laughing while setting his cup of tea down.

"Good! Extremely good!" he exclaimed sarcastically. "What are you waiting for? For me to kick you out? Get someone else in there!"

Wen Ning, who had grown accustomed to Wen Chao's harsh words, lowered his head in disappointment, upset that he hadn't hit his desired target. Wei Wuxian then approached him, his Jiang bell ringing around his waist.

"You were nervous again just now," Wei Wuxian started calmly. "It's no big deal. Your archery is excellent, really! Among the young disciples I've met, no more than three are better at archery than you!"

Some cultivators smiled as a result of Wei Wuxian's genuine encouragement. It's no wonder that the support Wei Wuxian showed to Wen Ning during their first encounter meant so much to him, who was more accustomed to being put down than being treated as a fellow human being. Wei Wuxian may have been the first person to offer him genuine words of encouragement, earning his trust, gratitude, and loyalty.

With a playful smile, Wei Wuxian pointed at Jiang Wanyin and continued, “Here, this one is not as good as you.”

Yu Ziyuan glared at Wei Wuxian.

“Tch.”

“Jiang Cheng, I was just teasing!”

“Huh?” Jiang Wanyin scowled and elbowed his brother behind the back. “Wanna die?”

Toppling forward, Wei Wuxian rubbed his sore back as he regained his balance and returned his gaze to Wen Ning.

“There’s nothing much to be nervous about,” he advised once more. “Practice more in public and you’ll get used to it. Next time, you’ll definitely impress everyone.”

“For those who are like Wen Ning, take note of that,” Wei Wuxian said and some earnestly nodded.

“Enough of this chitchat. Get into the arena!” Jiang Wanyin ordered.

“Alright!”

While the two brothers walked away, they did not notice Wen Ning’s speechless expression. A moment later, his face softened into a warm smile before the screen darkened.

It was safe to say that Wen Ning, the Ghost General whom everyone misunderstood, had grown to despise and fear, was not and would never be the type of person they expected him to be. With this, some cultivators began to feel guilty for passing judgment on the boy too quickly, while others dismissed the issue.

Soon after, a dense fog descended on the hunting grounds, making it even more desolate and foreboding. Wei Wuxian, Jiang Wanyin, and a few other Jiang disciples stood on the stone path, observing their surroundings.

“Eh? Where are the feral ghost targets?” one of the disciples inquired.

The eerie silence of their surroundings did not provide the answer they required, and a cloud of fog swept by, almost completely covering the silhouettes of the disciples.

“That place is so creepy.”

“That's literally the last place I'd go.”

“I don’t like this at all.”

“Where did all of your excitement go?”

“Comments aside, where are the feral ghost targets exactly?”

“Duh, hiding of course.”

Then, Jiang Wanyin made a choice. “Let’s split into two groups, then gather at the exit later.”

Seconds later, Jiang Wanyin and Wei Wuxian were forced to walk sideways on a very narrow path, their backs pressed against the wall, to keep their balance and avoid falling.

“Really? Of all the paths you could've taken, you chose a very dangerous one,” Jin Zixuan deadpanned. Jiang Wanyin glared at him, knowing he was the one who led them there.

Wei Wuxian smirked. “Where’s the fun in that?”

“Well, attempt the impossible,” Mianmian cheered dryly.

Panting slightly, Wei Wuxian cheerfully asked, “Hey, where the hell are you leading me to?”

“Stop complaining!” Jiang Wanyin demanded. “Just follow m—“

He did not get to finish his sentence as he hit his head into a rock.

Many cultivators laughed and snickered, while Yu Ziyuan cast an unimpressed look behind her son's back. Jiang Wanyin was so desperate to bury himself. Even his own nephew is laughing at him! What a brat! This was total humiliation, and he grimaced, knowing he was about to hit his head on another rock once again. He let his gaze wander to Wen Qing, where he noticed an amused smile on her lips and promptly blushed. Nobody asked him why he was blushing. Some thought he was red because he was embarrassed.

“Jiujiu—”

“If you say one word to me, Jin Ling, I will break your legs!” he threatens, and the kid shudders, despite knowing his uncle was all talk. Jiang Yanli embraced his son anyway.

“A-Cheng, no threatening,” she reprimanded softly, and both mother and son dissolved into giggles, causing Jiang Wanyin to groan. At this point, he just let everyone laugh. Jin Zixuan stared fondly at his son and wife.

Wei Wuxian's laughter shook the walls, and Jiang Wanyin gently touched his bruised forehead. In the following scene, the two were now crawling across the narrow tunnel. Wei Wuxian's constant giggles echoed off the walls, but Jiang Wanyin ignored them.

“Hey, how about we go back the way we came?” Wei Wuxian urged, still in the fit of giggles. “Rest assured, I definitely won’t tell anyone.”

“Just shut up, will y—Ah!”

Wei Wuxian burst out laughing yet again.

Jiang Wanyin pinched the bridge of his nose as the cackling and laughter became increasingly loud. In this situation, telling them all to shut up after they witnessed his mistake is pointless, so he tries to ignore the background noises and collects himself.

“It’s okay, Sect Leader Jiang,” Lan Xichen softly comforts him with a smile. “It’s alright to make mistakes.”

Jiang Wanyin had no idea what to make of Lan Xichen's words. He couldn't think of anything to say, so he just nodded awkwardly and returned his gaze to the screen.

“Be careful next time, A-Cheng,” Yanli reminded, still giggling. He can't even get his sister to shut up since he enjoys seeing her like that. Then..

“I’ll definitely pay if I get to see those again,” Wei Wuxian said, wiping the tears in the corner of his eyes.

“Shut up, Wei Wuxian!” Jiang Wanyin exclaimed, before continuing,, “As far as I know, Lan Wangji pays for all your needs.”

Wei Wuxian may have gone silent for a moment before turning towards his husband, and without saying anything yet, Lan Wangji had already nodded his head and said firmly, “Mn. I will pay for him.”

Jiang Wanyin wished he could wipe his brother's smirk away and strangle him right here.

As they exited the narrowed tunnel, Jiang Wanyin gently rubbed the lump on his forehead. Fortunately, his cultivation will quickly heal this, so hopefully, it will be gone soon so Wei Wuxian will stop laughing at him.

Approaching his brother, Wei Wuxian whispered, “Hey, Jiang Cheng!”

“What now?!” he demanded.

“Look!” Wei Wuxian said, pointing to the sky. Five ghosts were hovering more than twenty meters above the ground.

“Are those…” Jiang Wanyin trailed off, eyes widening. “The feral ghost targets!”

When examined closely, the feral ghost targets appear to be shadows wrapped in a cloak of darkness, with a human-like head and chest. Whips of dark energy surrounded them, dancing in an eerie and haunting manner.

Nie Huaisang moved slowly behind his brother's back to hide.

“Oh, this is going to be good!” Jingyi vibrated in his seat, shaking Sizhui who became dizzy later on.

The ghost lowered its head, its red blood eyes now open, and its stitched-together mouth stretched into a gluttonous grin. With an inhuman scream, three ghosts dashed towards them.

With a determined look, Jiang Wanyin reached for an arrow behind him, aimed it, and shot down one of the ghosts. A second later, he shot down another.

“Go, Sect Leader Jiang!”

“You can do this!”

The Jiang disciples cheered, unconcerned about their leader's reaction.

The ghost who screamed earlier moved at breakneck speed. He was going to shoot it down, but it was now only centimeters away from him. It's a wide mouth opening, ready to bite him—

“A-Cheng!”

“Jiang Cheng!”

“Sect Leader Jiang, watch out!”

Jiang Wanyin flinched and closed his eyes, bracing himself for the attack, only for the ghost to vanish. The arrow that had pierced it had fallen to the ground. He opened his eyes and looked down at the arrow on the ground before turning to his side to witness the remaining two ghosts being shot down as well and dissipating.

On a nearby cliff, perfect for shooting down ghosts, stood Wei Wuxian. He then looked down at his brother, and instead of the smug grin that many have grown accustomed to, Wei Wuxian gave him a delighted grin.

“You’re welcome~”

Lan Wangji made a pleased noise.

Jiang Wanyin realized he had been too slow. He would've been hurt if it hadn't been for his brother, and it was humiliating that he just stood there, waiting for that ghost to bite him down when he could've reached for his arrow and shot it down. What was he thinking at the time? Why was his response so slow?

He couldn't care less about what others think of him right now, but he's afraid of his parents' reaction. He'd been making mistakes here and there, and now he'd failed to demonstrate the full extent of his archery abilities. Nie Huaisang, Jin Zixuan, Jin Ling, Wei Wuxian, and Jiang Yanli flashed him worried looks, but he remained silent and focused on the screen.

While Jiang Wanyin was worried, Jiang Fengmian and Yu Ziyuan were relieved that Wei Wuxian had protected their son. Although the latter did feel bitter that Wei Wuxian demonstrated his archery skills once more.

A Yunmeng Jiang signal exploded into the air directly from where the ghosts had been shot.

Jin Guangshan stood up, a cup of tea in his hand, as he commented, “Clan Leader Jiang, disciples of your clan are truly skilled in archery! I’m sure that your clan will take the championship again this time.”

“Wait, Yunmeng Jiang won a lot of times?!” Zizhen gaped, turning to face Wei Wuxian, who was beaming from ear to ear.

“Of course!” Wei Wuxian happily chirped.

“Wow, that’s awesome!”

“They’re just too good!”

That being said, Wei Wuxian may be shameless, obnoxious, and constantly involved in problems, causing the Jiang Sect to lose face on numerous occasions, but his remarkable skills and limitless potential, bringing victories and achievements to Yunmeng Jiang, greatly aided the sect's reputation. Yu Ziyuan couldn't even make a bad comment right now. Really, how fortunate that Wei Wuxian is Jiang Fengmian's ward and is devoted to the sect. Without the presence of Cangse Sanren and Wei Changze's son, Yunmeng Jiang's reputation would have remained unchanged. He's far too talented.

“No wonder Xian-gege was so confident earlier,” Sizhui mumbled.

Jiang Fengmian smiled and raised his cup, saying, “You must be joking, Clan Leader Jin; nothing is certain until the match is over.”

“He seemed confident that his sect would win,” Madam Jin noted, to which Yu Ziyuan also observed but did not respond. To hear that somehow pleased her.

“I knew my disciples will do well,” Jiang Fengmian said, and for Yu Ziyuan, his words meant, *‘I knew A-Xian would do well,’* which irritated her, but then she noticed her son's expression and restrained herself from saying anything else.

Of course, not only Yu Ziyuan but also Jiang Fengmian noticed, and he said, “You did well, A-Cheng,”

Jiang Wanyin nodded reluctantly, slightly flustered by his father's praise; seriously, what was his expression earlier that prompted his father to praise him?

A moment later, two Gusu Lan, one Lanling Jin, and one Qinghe Nie signals exploded into the air. From his place, Wen Chao's brow twitched in annoyance as he looked over at the sect leaders' seats, glaring at them as they conversed with each other.

“Damn, not even one Wen signal exploded into the air yet,” a young man snorted.

“They’re bound to lose from the start anyway,” his friend replied, smirking.

“If he hadn't removed Wen Qionglin, they could've already gotten scores.”

However, the following signals were Qishan Wen and Wen Chao smirked and laughed to himself. The next signal that appeared in the air was five grey suns, indicating that all Wen competitors were out.

Several disciples cackled.

“Wow, they didn't even get halfway through the competition.”

“Pathetic.”

“They deserved to be kicked out of the competition.”

Wen Qing was secretly agreeing with the female cultivators around her, despite the fact that she is also a Wen.

Quite in disbelief, Jin Guangshan said, “Uh-oh, five down when the match is just getting started.”

“Exactly,” Jingyi smirked.

Wen Chao slammed his cup of tea onto the table, making Jin Guangshan look away, not wanting to provoke him in any way. However, Nie Mingjue was pleased with the outcome.

The current Nie Mingjue mirrored his simulation's reaction.

“Stop smirking, Da-ge,” Huaisang said, looking at him with concern. Though he also felt the same sentiment as his brother. “You creep me out.”

Nie Mingjue, of course, did not respond to his younger brother.

Then, the clouds swept across the sky, blocking the sun and dimming the grounds slightly.

Jin Guangshan frowned anxiously before looking up to the elevated pavilion where Wen Ruohan was before deciding to sit.

Wen Chao, enraged, abruptly stood up and walked towards the foot of the stairs leading up to his father's seat. He saluted and spoke.

“Father, I request your permission to compete in this match!”

Several people expressed their displeasure, mostly the old cultivators.

“Eh?” A-Qing asked. “He’s participating? Is that even fair?”

“It’s fair,” Xiao Xingchen responded softly. “He is not a sect leader and only a young master. He also has the privilege of joining whenever he wants, given that he’s the son of Wen Ruohan.”

“Is he even good at archery?” Jingyi complained upon hearing Xiao Xingchen’s response. “No offense, but he looks like he does not know how to draw a—”

“Jingyi,” Lan Qiren interjected, his tone laced with an unspoken warning, and the kid had no choice but to literally shut his mouth, while Zizhen and some disciples snickered on his side.

Back on the hunting grounds, Wei Wuxian pursued two more ghosts. His usual joy had been replaced by a determined, unwavering concentration, channeling spiritual energy into his arrow, allowing it to follow his desired target and pierce through. The second ghost easily avoided the arrow, but it didn't matter because that arrow had already pierced another ghost.

Their roles were reversed when the ghost took a turn. It swooped down on Wei Wuxian, chasing him. However, he dashed up to a rock boulder and punched the ghost hard into another rock, causing a large cloud of dust to form at the impact.

Some gaped in astonishment while some gave a low impressed whistle. Wei Wuxian strikes again, slowly gaining the respect of everyone in this temple, and Lan Wangji is more than happy to let them because their husband deserves it. Jin Ling turned to face him and just stared at him, not knowing what to say.

“Poor ghost,” Lan Xichen lamented.

“If you'd punched it instead, Zewu-jun, that ghost would've died,” Wei Wuxian chuckled. “Given your arm strength, my punch only knocked that thing out.”

“That’s quite an exaggeration, Wei-gongzi,” Lan Xichen responded, his eyes amused.

“No,” he insisted. “I witnessed it myself. Lan Zhan even—”

“Don't even tell Zewu-jun what you're trying to say next, Wei Wuxian,” Jiang Wanyin interjected. “No one needs to know.”

“I haven't even said anything.”

Madam Lan and Qingheng-jun both laughed.

Laying on the ground, unconscious because of the heavy blow, was the armless and legless ghost. Wei Wuxian approached as the cloud of dust slowly dissipated, smiling down at it.

“Wen’s feral ghost target is really no big deal,” Wei Wuxian chuckled, notching his arrow and aiming at the ghost when he widened his eyes and felt another presence of an arrow fly past his side, accurately hitting the ghost's forehead.

Wei Wuxian turned around and saw Wen Chao from a nearby rock boulder as a Qishan Wen signal shot into the air.

“He stole Senior Wei’s target!” a Lan disciple exclaimed.

“That’s unfair!” Zizhen complained.

“I wouldn’t call it unfair since it wasn’t stated in the rules that it’s forbidden to steal another’s target,” Nie Huaisang solemnly explained, his gaze fixed on Wen Chao with disgust. “However, it is undeniably unjust.”

The goal of this competition was to hunt down ghosts and earn points. Competitors may hunt too much or too little, and they may steal as well, as long as the shooter has earned enough points to be named one of the winners. As for Wen Chao, he probably chose to follow Wei

Wuxian because he knows he's good at hunting or simply wants to earn points without having to hunt for himself (All he has to do is rely on him and steal his targets.) A shitty idea, but not the worst according to Wei Wuxian. Seriously, any dirty tricks could occur at any moment.

Whatever. Lan Wangji and Wei Wuxian are both annoyed by this pompous man.

"*'Wen Chao'* and *'righteous'* unquestionably don't fit," Jiang Wanyin pointed out.

Wei Wuxian glared at him before clicking his tongue and walking away.

"Wei Wuxian," Wen Chao called out, "since I'm here now, I won't let you run rampant!"

Wei Wuxian, predictably, ignored him.

Yu Ziyuan gave a nod. Good, he knows when not to provoke people and when to be serious for a moment, thinking deeply about things, considering there were consequences of his actions that might lead to humiliation or ruin Jiang Sect's reputation.

Wei Wuxian bolted, and the Wen disciples followed. Every time he sees and moves to shoot the target, Wen Chao is there to shoot the target down first. Instead of becoming enraged, Wei Wuxian resisted and glared at him. The frustration of seeing his targets being shot down by someone was getting to him.

This Wei Wuxian was not the same as the one who had studied in the Cloud Recesses years before. This was something Lan Qiren had noticed yet again.

He had broken the rules and even explained his theory on resentful energy, and Lan Qiren thought he was far too unrestrained. He was afraid that if he didn't try to tame himself, Wei Wuxian would predictably irritate, provoke, or enrage people. But this is where he was mistaken. Wei Wuxian is both unrestrained and knowledgeable. He is well-versed in politics

and the cultivation world hierarchy, allowing him to think things through thoroughly and deeply about his actions without causing trouble for his sect.

He may not admit it out loud, but in some ways, Wei Wuxian was an excellent disciple.

Now, to gain an advantage in shooting down ghost targets, Wei Wuxian goes to higher grounds, just as he did when he was chased by feral corpses.

Compared to most competitors, Wen Chao had his own set of disciples following him, assisting him with handling the arrows and finding the targets. Wen Chao pulls out another arrow to take out the feral ghost when he misses.

The majority of cultivators were pleased with the outcome.

“Would you look at that, he missed,” Jingyi snorted in the loudest way possible.

Another arrow was fired at the ghost target, and that arrow was Wei Wuxian’s.

“Huh? W-What?”

Wen Chao's question was not finished when a Yunmeng Jiang signal exploded into the air, specifying Wei Wuxian’s victory, and at the same time, another grey-colored Qishan Wen signal exploded into the air, indicating the Wen’s loss.

“That's what you get for stealing other people's targets,” Mianmian said, smiling smugly.

“I wonder how Wen Ruohan feels right now that his son has embarrassed his sect,” Cangse Sanren said, a half-smile on her lips.

Wei Wuxian landed gracefully on the ground and turned to Wen Chao with a teasing smile, “I appreciate that.”

“Wei Wuxian! You!”

Enraged by his defeat, Wen Chao grabbed three arrows and aimed them at the nearby flying ghost targets.

“He’s out,” Song Lan noted. “Why is he still attempting to shoot?”

“That’s because he’s a shithead who can't handle his own loss,” Jiang Wanyin deadpanned.

“No cursing, Sect Leader Jiang,” Lan Xichen gently reminded, and, of course, the said man only rolled his eyes while the other glanced at him in amusement.

“Wen-er-gongzi, I wonder if your eyes are failing,” Wei Wuxian mockingly inquired, crossing his arms and amusingly staring at Wen Chao’s back. “You can’t even see the extremely striking signal of your end.”

“What did you say?!” Wen Chao demanded.

“One must quit after shooting the wrong target or off target,” Jiang Wanyin recited as he approached Wei Wuxian's side with an Ouyang disciple.

Zizhen smiled as he saw another Ouyang disciple.

“Rules? What rules? I am the rules!”

The rest of the cultivators, including Baoshan Sanren, frowned at Wen Chao's arrogant declaration.

"Arguing with him is illogical at this point," A-Qing grumbled, recalling how Xue Yang was also stubborn, acted as Xiao Xingchen, and gained Wei Wuxian's trust just because he wanted Xiao Xingchen's shattered soul to be repaired. Wei Wuxian had said many times that he couldn't fix his soul, but Xue Yang was being unreasonable, refusing to hear Wei Wuxian's words and demanding him to fix his soul no matter what.

"Just because he's Wen Ruohan's son doesn't give him the right to bend the rules like that," a young man hissed. "What a dunce."

Jiang Wanyin frowned. "Utterly unreasonable! Those are the rules set by his own clan!"

The Ouyang disciple on Jiang Wanyin's side scoffed, muttering, "He's just abusing his surname as a Wen. Fish begins to stink at the head," and began walking away."

"What did you say?!" Wen Chao demanded once again.

Instantly, Wen Chao turned around and aimed the three arrows meant for the ghost targets. The Ouyang disciple was unaware, and Jiang Wanyin was too far away to stop the arrows.

"Ouyang!" Jiang Wanyin exclaimed. "Watch out!"

Zizhen mimicked the young Jiang Wanyin's reaction, his hands clasped as if praying for the safety of his fellow disciples. He didn't even know this man.

The Ouyang disciple turned around, his eyes wide as the incoming three arrows reflected in his eyes.

A white ribbon flew by.

In the next second, Lan Wangji appeared as he jumped from one of the rock boulders. His fiery red golden robes, hair, and forehead ribbon fluttered gracefully and elegantly as he spin in the air. He took one of his arrows from his back and aimed it directly at one of Wen Chao's arrows before releasing it.

Lan Wangji's arrow pierced through Wen Chao's, severing it in half. As a result of the shattered pieces, it collided with the remaining two arrows, causing it to fall. Lan Wangji's arrow, which contained spiritual power, flew passed the Ouyang disciple, and a ghost target appeared ahead. When the arrow struck its head, a Gusu Lan signal shot into the air, earning Lan Sect a point.

"Wow," the disciples and some other cultivators gaped in astonishment and gave respective nods to Lan Wangji. Lan Qiren even smiled a little and turned to look proudly at his nephew. Yu Ziyuan, on the other hand, appeared to be about to say something. The display of abilities irritated her yet again. It reminded her that her own son was not as capable as the second jade and Wei Wuxian. It made her wonder if her son would ever be able to outperform the two of them.

"Oh, my A-Zhan is so good!" Madam Lan cheered, promptly squishing the second jade's cheeks while his ears were stained red.

"He trained a lot," Lan Xichen teasingly interjected. "Said that he wanted to surpass someone."

Qingheng-jun, knowing who the first jade is pertaining to, smiled and said, "Oh? Surpass or impress someone?"

"Both," Lan Wangji replied firmly, causing the Lan family to laugh fondly at his sincere response.

Wei Wuxian smiled, his heart filled with pride and love. His husband is extremely talented. He loves him so much.

“Lan Wangji, I really need you to teach me how to be elegant,” Cangse Sanren teased, casting a glance at Lan Qiren. “Someone keeps saying I look like I want to fight everybody all the time.”

“I did not say you look like—”

“Same thing!”

Lan Qiren even wondered as to how he had become friends with this woman in the first place.

Lan Wangji landed gracefully in front of Wei Wuxian, blocking him from Wen Chao, as if to protect him. Now it was them and Jiang Wanyin against Wen Chao.

“You….all of you!”

With an angry scoff, Wen Chao threw his bow in the air, and one of his servants caught it. He stormed away, glaring at the three.

Yu Ziyuan, Jiang Fengmian, and Wen Qing’s faces morphed into a pleasing look, relieved that the boy was finally leaving the hunting grounds.

“He’s finally walking out,” Sizhui smiled.

“Honestly, I can't believe he got that far,” Jin Ling said. “If it hadn't been for that Ouyang disciple and Hanguang-jun, he'd have kept stealing Wei Wuxian's targets.”

Wei Wuxian grinned. “Aww, A-Ling, you care about me!”

“Shut up! I don’t—”

“A-Ling,” Yanli said, and Jin Ling sheepishly apologized.

Jin Zixuan concurs. “A-Ling is right though. Wen Chao could have won without even trying, and Yunmeng Jiang would lose.”

“Lan Zhan, nice shot!” Wei Wuxian praised him, but as usual, he was being ignored again, which is fine. When the screen focused on Lan Wangji’s departing back, they were allowed to see his askew forehead ribbon.

Lan Xichen and the other Lans' eyes widened in horror.

“H-Hanguang-jun’s ribbon..”

“He does not notice..”

“What if it falls?!”

“What if someone accidentally grabs it?!”

Wei Wuxian couldn't decide whether to laugh or cry.

Wei Wuxian noticed this right away and exclaimed, “Hey, Wangji-xiong! Your forehead ribbon is slanted!”

Glancing to the head disciple a little, he muttered, “Pathetic.”

“I really mean it this time!” Wei Wuxian approached the second jade. “I’ll fix it for you!”

Horrified, even more, most of the Lans and other cultivators exclaimed, “Noooo!!!”

While some shouted, “Yessss!!” instead.

Then Wei Wuxian reached out his hand and pulled the white ribbon down. Because the knot was almost undone, it became really easy for the Jiang disciple to pull it down without needing force.

Lan Qiren fainted.

“Uncle!”

“Brother!”

Wei Wuxian silently lit a candle for Lan Qiren in his heart.

Jiang Wanyin, on the other hand, was so taken aback that he exclaimed, “What the fuck did you do, Wei Wuxian?!”

In slow motion, Lan Wangji’s eyes widened in horror as he realized that the tightly wrapped cloth on his forehead had finally loosened, fluttering down as if his entire dreams had come crashing down. The ribbon fell on Wei Wuxian’s hands. The second jade’s breath became heavy, his restraint slipping, his body trembling, seething with rage. He slowly turned around, and Wei Wuxian flinched back, seeing the dark, bloodshot eyes on Lan Wangji.

Lan Xichen could see it. Yes, there was anger, but his brother's eyes were filled with fear and anxiety. The ribbon had a deep significance. It is sacred to all Lan Sect members, and no one else may touch it unless they are a member of their family or a fated person. Wei Wuxian may be the person his brother likes and loves, but Wei Wuxian also enjoys teasing others and constantly flirts with girls. The reason for his brother's rage in this scene could be that Wei Wuxian had taken the meaning of the forehead ribbon as a joke, he's mocking him, or he's taking his brother's feelings as a joke. In any case, his brother's rage was understandable.

Wei Wuxian took another step back, his face regretful. "Sorry, I really didn't mean to."

Ah, so this is what's causing this brother's rage and internal conflict. Wei Wuxian probably didn't remember the meaning of the ribbon and just pulled his brother's and said he didn't '*mean'* to pull it down and regretted it, which probably hurt his brother's feelings or more. In any case, he forced his brother to break another rule, only this time it was much worse.

Lan Wangji's face darkened as he stared at the head disciple.

"Here you go. You can tie it up again." Wei Wuxian said, offering his forehead back, despite the murderous glower directed at him by the second jade. He looked as if he was about to slice Wei Wuxian in half if he didn't stop talking right away, or if he'll come closer to him.

For Lan Wangji, his words were interpreted as, *'Here, your heart, I'll return it to you. I cannot be your fated person.'*

"No!!" Wei Wuxian exclaimed, probably louder than he'd ever been, startling some cultivators. He just cannot accept that his husband had thought of that. He will always be Lan Wangji's fated person today and in any lifetime.

"I have your heart, alright? I will never, ever return it to you! It is mine!" Wei Wuxian declared, and Lan Wangji smiled.

"Of course. I have your heart as well. I will take care of it, and I will never give it back to you. It is mine," Lan Wangji declared as well, causing Wei Wuxian's cheeks to flush rose.

“Ugh, Lan Zhan!!”

“You two are so—” Jiang Wanyin pretended to gag, only to be elbowed by Jiang Yanli.

“Get a room!” exclaimed Mianmian, delighted. “The dog food is simply too much. Oh wait, it can never be too much.”

“Miamian, don’t say that,” Jin Zixuan warned. “I'm not sure I'll be able to handle it.”

“Then instead of watching others, flirt with your wife,” Madam Jin interjected. In an instant, Jiang Yanli and Jin Zixuan's cheeks turned bright red.

His ribbon on Wei Wuxian's hands only aggravated the second jade. He clenched his fist tightly around his bow, causing it to shatter into small shards of wood.

Some people may have flinched at the unexpected shattering. Though the bow's shattering demonstrated how strong the majority of Lan Sect disciples were, as they focused more on hand standing while writing in punishments and training.

Wei Wuxian was completely perplexed at this point. He retreated once more. “This is just a forehead ribbon, right?”

Qingheng-jun even frowned in response, not liking the way Wei Wuxian disregarded the significance of their ribbons.

Lan Wangji snatched his ribbon from Wei Wuxian's grasp and walked away without saying anything.

‘What’s with him?’ **Wei Wuxian enquired.**

“Sorry, Lan Zhan,” Wei Wuxian said, and the other shook his head and rubbed circles on his husband's back.

“No sorry’s between us, remember?”

“Yes.”

Soon, the sun started to slowly set and the competition finally concluded. The competitors then re-assembled on the field.

“What?! Lan Zhan left the competition early?! When?!” he exclaimed, surprised at the unexpected outcome. He had thought the second would continue until the competition ended. Was it because of him?

Lan Wangji immediately clarified, saying, “No, it was not because of you.”

Wei Wuxian embraced him.

“Perhaps you shouldn't try to pull someone's forehead ribbon from now on,” Zizhen cautioned, nervously laughing, still reeling from Lan Wangji's terrifying outburst earlier.

“I’ll pull no one’s forehead ribbon but Lan Zhan’s,” Wei Wuxian declared, and Lan Wangji hummed in agreement.

“After you ripped off his forehead ribbon,” Jiang Wanyin explained.

Wei Wuxian then glanced behind him where Lan Wangji stood, his eyes cast downward as Lan Xichen silently consoled him.

“It’s only a forehead ribbon. Is it really necessary to get so angry?”

“Shut up!” Wei Wuxian hissed at his younger self. The last thing he wants is for Lan Zhan’s father to be upset with him. Even his own father looked a bit disappointed in him.

“Everyone understands the significance of the Lan Clan's forehead ribbon, but you just can't stop causing trouble, can you?”

“That’s right,” Yu Ziyuan concurs. “He's causing havoc wherever he goes, and who will be held accountable for—”

“My son did a mistake, yes,” Cangse Sanren interjected, her tone slightly irritated. “But he didn't intend for it to happen. Though I apologize for his ignorance against the meaning of the forehead ribbon,” she turns to Qingheng-jun, who nods gratefully. “However, Yu Ziyuan, stop insulting my son. I tolerated it before, but if you say it again, I will not hesitate to attack you.”

“Mother!” Wei Wuxian exclaimed in horror.

“You think I’m afraid of you?” Yu Ziyuan seethes. “I am not! Go on, attack me then! I will attack you twofold!”

“San-niang, stop!” Jiang Fengmian exclaimed, but Jiang Wanyin stopped his father and took a step forward.

“Cangse-qianbei, I apologize on behalf of my mother for insulting your son,” he bowed respectfully.

“Jiang Cheng! Stand up!” Yu Ziyuan demanded, enraged and shocked that her son was now bowing on her behalf, but he did not budge. He will bow at every opportunity to apologize to

his brother.

Cangse Sanren smiled briefly before faltering. “Yu Ziyuan, you should learn from him. Your child clearly knows how to apologize.”

“You!”

“San-niang!” Jiang Fengmian yelled, clutching his wife's arm, “please remember A-Li’s wish earlier, please!”

She was fuming with rage. She couldn't stop her body from shaking, so she used her husband's hand on her arm to ground herself and calm down. Her eyes drifted towards her daughter, and she noticed a hint of disappointment in her expression, which she didn't want to see any longer. She scoffed and averted her gaze from Cangse Sanren, refusing to say anything else. For once, her silence satisfied Cangse Sanren.

“Stand up, Sect Leader Jiang,” Cangse Sanren said, and the man obeyed. She didn't say anything else and returned her attention to the screen.

“Lan Wangji must hate you to the guts,” Jiang Wanyin assumed.

Lan Wangji must have sensed Wei Wuxian's gaze on him because he glared back.

Oh, so it was Jiang Wanyin who planted the seed of suspicion that Lan Wangji despised Wei Wuxian. His displeasure with this man really has now reached new heights.

This is sad for Wei Wuxian. He'd been led to believe Lan Wangji despised him all along. His actions before were loud, but his words were not. There had been numerous miscommunications between them, which frequently left them awkward at the end. An example of that was Lan Wangji's desire to bring Wei Wuxian back to Cloud Recesses to hide him, keep him safe, and protect him, but Wei Wuxian had always assumed Lan Wangji only

wanted him to come back to Gusu to punish him and bring him back to the sword path. Oh, he was so wrong.

His harsh words were only a defense mechanism to protect himself, but they hurt Lan Wangji, and Wei Wuxian knew they left several scars on his heart and mind. In his honor, he was marred with thirty-three scars on his back, unable to heal for eternity. Just many scars will Wei Wuxian inflict on Lan Wangji? How much pain can Lan Wangji take? Wei Wuxian had often wondered how he deserved this good, righteous, beautiful man who did nothing but love him from afar and silently, who only wanted him safe and protected. He often even questioned whether he had any right to love Lan Wangji at all.

“I don’t hate you, Wei Ying,” Lan Wangji said softly against his ears. He must have noticed his husband's despondent expression.

“Hmm,” Wei Wuxian hummed, “I know now.”

Seconds later, Wen Chao was back in his seat, sipping his tea. The announcer then unrolled a scroll to begin announcing the winners.

“Xuan Zheng, Year of Ji Mao, Qishan Discussion Conference, the Archery Competition, first place, Yunmeng Jiang Clan’s, Wei Wuxian!”

The disciples applauded and congratulated him, while the man in question laughed happily and waved them off shyly. Jiang Wanyin smiled at his brother, filled with pride. A stark contrast to the reaction of the young Jiang Wanyin.

The Yunmeng Jiang disciples grinned and began lifting and spinning Wei Wuxian in the air.

“Indeed you’re our Da shixiong!”

“We won!”

“Da shixiong is awesome!”

Nearby, Wen Ning smiled at the cheering Yunmeng Jiang disciples. He’s happy that Wei Wuxian won, he deserved it.

“Aww, Wen Ning, you're so sweet!”

“T-Thank you, Wei-gongzi.”

“Second place, Gusu Lan Clan’s, Lan Xichen!”

The Lan disciples, including Nie Mingjue, congratulated Lan Xichen.

“Good job, A-Huan.”

“Thank you, Father.”

Lan Qiren awoke in an instant after hearing the name of his first nephew.

“Are you okay now, brother?” Qingheng-jun asked, assisting his brother, who did not respond and simply let his brother assist him.

“Third place, Lanling Jin Clan’s, Jin Zixuan!”

“Congratulations, A-Die!” Jin Ling cheered, laughing happily, as Jiang Yanli hugged his husband. Madam Jin, on the other hand, smiled proudly at her son.

“Thank you,” Jin Zixuan responded cheerfully.

“Fourth place, Gusu Lan Clan’s, Lan Wangji!”

“A-Zhan, you still got fourth place. That’s good enough,” Qingheng-jun praised and Lan Wangji nodded in thanks, still not used to hearing his father praise him.

“Wow, two of the top four are Lan Clan members. Amazing!”

All cultivators could agree that the Twin Jades of Gusu Lan is just that good!

“Lan Wangji still reached the fourth place albeit leaving early,” a Yunmeng Jiang disciple said.

“Looking at the Wen Clan, they held the competition, but they didn't even make the top four. How embarrassing!” Another Yunmeng Jiang disciple added.

Nie Mingjue had to tamp down his excitement about the Wens who did not make the list of winners. The majority of the cultivators even smiled, pleased with the result of the competition. Some Nie disciples were no longer surprised that they were not named among the winners. They fight in close quarters with sabers. Long-range combat is undoubtedly one of the sect's weaknesses.

Wen Ning could have gotten a spot if Wen Chao hadn't kicked him out. He was so good, and the opportunity to show off his abilities was taken away so quickly.

Hearing the trio, Jiang Wanyin coughed slightly to draw their attention and remind them of their location.

“Shut it,” he warned.

A baleful wind started to pick up as Wen Ruohan frowned at the results, boiling with rage. Then, with grace, he set his cup down and laughed. “Good. People with talent emerged in succession among the Four Clans,” he says as he stands up. “Since the competition is over, I will take my leave. Everyone, enjoy your drinks.”

“Farewell, Clan Leader Wen!” The Wen disciples exclaimed.

“Wow, the anger and humiliation really made him leave early,” a female cultivator snickered.

“I would, too, if they humiliated my sect in that way.”

Wen Chao then appeared on the screen, commanding. “Rise, all of you!”

Jin Guangshan fixed his gaze on the departing chief cultivator before turning to a frowning Lan Qiren and sharing his observation, “Clan Leader Wen is obviously displeased. We hogged the limelight at Qishan, I now feel fear for our act of arrogance.”

“Youths are more free-spirited by nature,” Jiang Fengmian observed as he poured himself a cup of tea. “The future of the cultivation clans still depends on these youths," and it's difficult to predict what might happen in the future.”

Yes, the future is unpredictable; no one expected Wei Wuxian to become a demonic cultivator, while also expecting him to become one of the greatest cultivators in the cultivation world.

As the sun began to set behind the towering rock mountains, the screen darkened, bringing the memory to a close.

“That’s the end of the memory for now. We will take a short break,” Baoshan Sanren announced.

“So one thing is clear, Wen Chao is an idiot,” Jiang Wanyin spoke, breaking the silence that had started to fester since earlier.

“I second that,” Jin Ling concurs, earning a glare from his Uncle.

“What I'm curious about is why Wen Xu isn't in the competition,” Madam Jin observed with a frown on her face. “Isn't he Wen Ruohan's eldest child?”

“Yes, he is,” Lan Wangji replied sharply, recalling how Wen Xu broke his leg after burning down his home.

Nie Mingjue scowled. “He could be lounging off in his home for all we care. I'm just glad only his second son was present. I'm not sure I can handle his two sons simultaneously.”

“The next memory would be the indoctrination led by Wens once again, right?” Song Lan inquired and Nie Huaisang nodded.

“Wen Chao even had our swords confiscated, leaving us vulnerable and defenseless against the Xuanwu of Slaughter.”

“The nerve of that man,” Madam Lan hissed. She could picture Lan Xichen and Lan Wangji in desperate need to escape the beast, and she didn't like any of it.

“Hmm, but Wen Xu burned down Cloud Recesses just before indoctrination,” Wei Wuxian growled. He even tried to help his husband after learning what had happened to him and his home, but the man was stubborn and refused any help offered by him, but he did not let his response disappoint him and continued to help him in any way he could.

“What?” Wei Changze's eyes widened in surprise, and he turned to face Lan Qiren and Qingheng-jun, who had turned away. This alone validated his son's statement.

“Wen Ruohan really went mad huh? That bastard,” Cangse Sanren clenched her fists. She'd never met him, but she'd heard his name every time he mentioned it in the past. Though his name was mentioned, it was with scorn rather than praise. Many feared his name, and Cangse Sanren took note of it in case she met him in person. The last thing she wanted was to be killed, but it appears she died before she met him.

“He was tough to kill,” Nie Mingjue blurted. “He had the strength of a mountain.”

“But he was defeated right?” Baoshan Sanren interjected, “by the hands of someone who will soon become the cultivation world's greatest foe.”

Many people scowled, knowing who she was referring to, while others were perplexed, but based on everyone’s reaction, they assumed that person must be worse than Wen Ruohan.

Lan Xichen's face became sad as melancholy and regret washed over him, while Nie Mingjue's hatred for that man grew even stronger.

“Without this existing knowledge, who do you think would win a fight?” Baoshan Sanren asked as she began to pace, her thoughtful gaze observing all of the cultivators' reactions. “A physically and mentally strong cultivator who cultivated for years, almost reaching immortality, or an unstable but weak man with a cunning and calculating mind who planned everything ahead of time and always succeeded.”

She waited for one of them to respond, and it appeared that they have their answer, but refused to voice it out.

“Of course you'd pick the physically and mentally strong cultivator who cultivated for years and nearly attained immortality to win, right?” Baoshan Sanren smirked. The cultivators followed her every move, waiting for the conclusion of her explanation and her point. “Consider a lion, king of the jungle, king of beasts, strong, dominating, and intelligent. And then a snake comes, a limbless reptile, small, cunning, yet poisonous and lethal.”

An image of a lion and a snake appeared in her hand. The lion roars loudly, while the snake hisses, bearing its long fangs to demonstrate its willingness to fight. The two animals are fighting for supremacy.

“Lions frequently underestimate snakes because they are small; they're wary of them rather than afraid of them. But a single lethal bite from it and the lion dies. Do you understand what that means? A physically strong being is defenseless against a weak person with a mind unlike any other,” she concluded, and they finally understood her explanation.

An elderly man objected, “But Wen Ruohan is smart—”

“Yes, he is and I admit that,” she says, cutting the man off before he can explain. “But he's also a fool for putting his trust in that man. In the end, he was backstabbed by him.”

That was true. He was a spy, working undercover ro gather information from within Wen Clan and from Wen Sect members. He had Wen Ruohan wrapped around his finger and easily fooled him. His manipulation was rather excellent, if not a terrifying skill no one wanted to experience for themselves, and yet there was a bigger snake than him, and he was in the same room as the cultivators.

Some people were wary of Nie Huaisang. His now-cold demeanor made them shudder.

“Do any of you want me to erect privacy barriers again?” she asked, to which everyone shook their heads. “So none of the moment. Good.”

Whips of spiritual gold encircled her hand. She unleashed a torrent of spiritual energy towards the other door on the near side of the pillar where Wen Ning had previously stood. In a matter of seconds, the door burst open.

“Let's eat for a minute; we've been watching the memory for quite some time.”

The cultivators cracked a huge grin before exclaiming, “Yesss! We’re hungry!!”

Chapter End Notes

I apologize for the delay in updating. I had a difficult month. I moved into another house and moved my belongings as well, and then I was hospitalized for a week, and immediately after I recovered, I was called into my university to help organize three-day event, so I had no time to write at all. I think I started writing this chapter about a week ago. So, I apologize to everyone. Because our face-to-face classes begin on Monday, perhaps the next chapter will take as long. Huhu, I really hope I have more time to quickly publish a chapter soon.

Thank you for your patience!

The Indoctrination

Chapter Notes

> Hello! I'm back after such a long absence! I've been extremely busy, and this brief semester break has allowed me to continue working on this story. I apologize for not updating earlier than expected! I'd like to assure you that I will never, ever discontinue this story. It's just that my updates will be a little longer than usual. But enough of that; you can now begin reading. Happy Halloween!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The cultivators all entered the room. Then, their mouths dropped and watered when they saw the amount of food on the long table. They simultaneously turned to the immortal, who gave a short nod before they dug in and ate to their heart's content. Wei Wuxian, a sucker for spice, devoured the red-looking soup dish right away. Lan Wangji and Jiang Wanyin were tempted to sigh but resisted. On the other hand, Madam Jin moved closer to her grandson. Jin Ling raised his head and noticed his grandmother smiling fondly at him. It flustered him to know only a handful of people were fond of him (specifically his shushu and his dajiu).

"Hello, A-Ling," Madam Jin greeted, and the young Sect Leader gave a respectful bow at her.

"H-Hello, Nainai," he greeted back and Madam Jin chuckled.

"We did not have the chance to talk properly."

"Yes, I think so."

"How are you?" she inquired softly as if speaking to a literal infant. Jin Ling's cheeks were painted pink as he looked down.

"I am well," he responded, but being a young sect leader with little knowledge of how to manage and run his sect is a difficult task. He's so grateful to have his uncle by his side to

help him. Despite his short temper, he never lost faith in him and never gave up on him. “Uncle is assisting me in becoming a Sect Leader.”

“Jiang Wanyin? That’s good,” she asked, turning her gaze to the current Sect Leader of Yunmeng Jiang, who is now conversing with his sister and Jin Zixuan. “He did a good job raising you. I thank him for that.”

She had known Jiang Wanyin's personality since he was a child; he had the same personality as his mother. Having no experience with children, raising a child that was not his own, and being a Sect Leader must've been so difficult for him. Not to mention losing his loved ones and people. She couldn't imagine what the man had gone through, but she appreciated and was grateful for everything he did to protect and raise Jin Ling.

“Yes,” Jin Ling said, smiling slightly. “I thank him for raising me as well.”

“Such a cute child,” Madam Jin says, ruffling her grandchild’s hair briefly. “I would like to know my grandchild a little better. You can also inquire about me and your father. I will respond to all of them.”

Jin Ling looked up at his grandmother, hesitant and embarrassed, but he figured that knowing something about her grandmother and father and what they were like in the past was rather good and intriguing; he wanted to know more about his father, preferably his embarrassing moments. Hearing how his father confessed his feelings to his mother, he couldn't get the scene out of his head. It replayed endlessly in his mind.

“Nainai, about father..”

Madam Jin answered all of Jin Ling's questions, and the boy nodded and smiled at every detail his grandmother revealed. Jiang Yanli and Jin Zixuan laughed heartily when they saw their son's enthusiasm. However, Yu Ziyuan was once again envious. She, too, did not have the opportunity to speak with her grandson, and it appeared that her grandson would never speak to her after seeing how he scowled and glared at her earlier. Really, she should teach Jin Ling how to respect and talk to their grandparents. Jin Ling had been disrespectful and rude to her.

“A-Niang, stop glaring at Jin Ling,” Jiang Wanyin reminded. “The more you glare, the less likely he is to come at you.”

“That brat isn't talking to me or greeting me; did you even teach him proper man—”

"I did my best, A-Niang," Jiang Wanyin interrupted, jaw clenching with annoyance. His mother did not know anything. She did not know the hardships he went through upon raising and teaching Jin Ling (including proper behavior), molding him into a proper cultivator, and protecting him from all cultivators who wished to harm him. The fact that his mother is questioning his method of teaching irritates him. He expected her to be respectful at the very least.

Yu Ziyuan glared, “Surely you did not. That brat is—”

“A-Niang,” Jiang Fengmian interjected. “Please eat and talk later.”

Yu Ziyuan scoffed and began to eat. Jiang Wanyin nodded his thanks to his father, who in turn smiled at him.

“The food here is so good!” shouted a female cultivator. “I've never had food like this before!”

“Me too! Is there one of these in the cultivation world? There has to be, right?”

“Perhaps, but let's get back to eating!”

“Wei Ying, swallow the food first before talking,” Lan Wangji gently reminded his husband, wiping the sauce from the corner of his lips. Wei Wuxian was tempted to lick his husband's thumb in front of everyone, but he was not that brazen.

“Aiya, Lan Zhan, I need to tell Shijie about me and Jin Ling’s night hunts together,” Wei Wuxian smiled fondly at his husband, and when Lan Wangji finished, he turned to face his sister, telling each story with fascination and enthusiasm.

“I worry he might choke,” Lan Xichen muttered.

“He will literally choke, Zewu-jun,” Mianmian joked, amused by Yuandao's hand gestures while speaking.

“The food isn't the only thing he'll choke on later,” Nie Huaisang stated as if he didn’t just drop a huge bomb, making those around him stare as if he'd grown another head. Lan Qiren and Qingheng-jun choked, while Nie Mingjue looked as if he was about to throw his brother out the window. “What? I’m just saying.”

“Say something appropriate!” Nie Mingjue exclaimed.

“Daozhang, I feel like I don’t belong here, but the food here has to be one of the best food I’ve tasted. Maybe in my whole life!” A-Qing cheered, munching on a moon cake.

“What do you mean you don’t belong here? We are clearly your friends!” Jingyi said appearing behind A-Qing, startling her that he was smacked in the head.

“Jingyi!”

“Don’t start appearing behind me! And when are we even friends?!”

“A-Qing, don’t yell at your friends,” Xiao Xingchen said, a smile gracing his lips while Song Lan nodded in agreement.

“Wen Qing, Wen Ning,” Baoshan Sanren quietly approaches the siblings. The siblings then

bowed in respect, but they were perplexed as to why she'd suddenly called them and what she needed from them, which was out of the question because she doesn't need anything from them.

“What does the Immortal need?” Wen Qing politely inquired.

I'd like to speak with both of you about something,” the immortal said, her gaze drawn to Wen Qing's timid brother. “Would you mind passing on some knowledge to me?”

The Wen siblings stare at each other, unsure what she meant, but Wen Qing had a feeling the immortal would inquire about *'that.'* But, knowing what happened, why would the immortal want to talk about it? Unless she deliberately skips that section of Wei Wuxian's memory.

“Of course,” Wen Qing responded and both siblings were led quietly to an empty room surrounded by golden privacy barriers.

“So, tell me how you came to theorize the golden core transfer,” she said as Wen Ning’s eyes widened while Wen Qing sighs. Right.

“It was just a thought at first, but it became a constant thought afterward. No one from the cultivation world is able to transfer a golden core to another person, and no one would be brave enough to give up their cores for another person, at least I thought so,” she said, glancing at Wei Wuxian with a fond look. “While thinking about it and gathering more information about golden cores, and listing several possibilities of what will be the results, I thought, *‘will the person with a new transferred core be able to utilize the core like he used to? Would they still be as powerful as they once were? Or would they be more vulnerable? Will they reject the core, or will their body reject the core?* ”’ she paused for a moment to sigh.

“The possibilities were so endless that achieving this theory became my goal, but I soon discovered that removing one's core could be as difficult as removing half of a person's soul, which could result in a person dying or not. I set aside this theory because I would not risk doing this to a person, especially when I haven't done it to anyone else, but Wei Wuxian somehow found my notes,” she said, recalling how Wei Wuxian begged her with a look of grief and resignation on his face. It was difficult not to cry because no one is as selfless as he

is. For his brother, he would do anything, just as she would do anything to keep her brother safe. It had to be how she agreed to transfer his core to Jiang Wanyin.

Baoshan Sanren had a thoughtful look on her face while listening to her. It was brilliant how this woman came up with such a remarkable theory. “What was the most challenging part about removing his golden core?” she inquired.

“Detaching all the streams one by one until only the connection to the soul remains,” she answered and Baoshan Sanren nodded. Wen Ning is suddenly perplexed as to why his sister is revealing all of this information to the immortal when all she has done before was lie.

“Did you detach his meridians?”

“No.”

The immortal smiled meaningfully. Wen Qing did not sever all of his meridians. This must be why Lan Wangji kept transferring spiritual energy to him before because he still felt something inside him. However, the fact that she did not detach all of his meridians, on the other hand, means something.

“You hope that he’ll grow another golden core,” she said, not a question but a statement.

“I buried that hope a long time ago when I removed his core. There has been no record of anyone growing another golden core after it was destroyed or removed.” Wen Qing’s gaze hardened at the immortal. What is she trying to say now?

“Right. Meridians are powered by a golden core; without it, cultivators become mediocre. You did not detach all of his meridians because you hoped that a *specific* cultivator would transfer him spiritual energy that would help balance the resentful energy in his body, but you are wrong on this, Lady Wen,” Wen Qing could only look down as if she has been caught stealing. She knew that being transferred with spiritual energy would not help balance Wei Ying’s resentful energy. Baoshan Sanren knows this too. The spiritual energy that’s being transferred to him would be stuck on his meridians until another core is transferred.

Baoshan Sanren then continues, “After you removed his core, I can only assume that there were still bits of spiritual energy flowing on his meridians, but after being thrown in the burial mounds, the resentful energy filled his meridians, dominating the spiritual energy. Furthermore, the resentful energy is the only thing that’s keeping him alive, that’s why Wei Ying refused to be cleansed before, am I right, Lady Wen?”

Wen Qing simply stared at her, and that was enough. She couldn't believe she knew all the answers right away, but she was smart. She was aware of both the truth and her false beliefs.

“You are right, immortal,” Wen Qing saluted at her, and Wen Ning did the same, despite the fact that he had only been listening to the two since the beginning.

“So you did not detach all of his meridians in the hopes that if another core was transferred to him and all of those stored spiritual energies on his meridians would power that core that would dominate the resentful energy; his death would be avoided, and cleansing would be possible. Have I figured much, Lady Wen?” she asked, the smile on her face only grew wider.

“Yes, Immortal.”

Baoshan Sanren then remained silent for a few moments, as if deep in thought. Then she spoke, “Mo Xuanyu’s core has been growing a bit stronger, but it is still not as strong as Wei Wuxian's original core.”

“Yes, I have noticed,” Wen Qing concurred.

“Wei-gongzi has been training with Hanguang-jun for quite some time now,” Wen Ning provided shyly. “I witnessed them sparring in their spare time.”

Baoshan Sanren raised a brow, “Is that so?”

“Yes, but I think he still misses wielding his own sword more than a normal sword,” Wen Ning revealed, recalling Wei Wuxian's melancholy expression as he stared at the normal sword the Lan Disciples gave him.

“I have a great proposition to make, care to hear me out?” she smiled that sent goosebumps up both siblings' spines, but they reluctantly agreed.

The three discussed several things before leaving the room. Wen Qing had a thoughtful look on her face, while Wen Ning was both delighted and concerned. The two siblings sat and Wen Qing ate quietly, which was soon noticed by Lan Sizhui.

“Auntie, is something wrong?” he asked, concerned, and Wen Qing smiled fondly at his cousin.

“"I am fine; there is no need to be concerned.”

“But you’re silent.”

“I am silent all of the time, A-Yuan.”

“But I recall you shouting all the time—”

“That’s because Wei Wuxian is a pain in the ass,” Wen Qing quickly responded, her brows twitching.

Wei Wuxian, having heard his name, turned to face them, a chicken leg in his mouth, “What? I heard my name; are you talking behind my back, Qing-jie?” he dramatically dropped his chicken leg and clutched his chest.

Wen Qing sighed and rolled her eyes. “I'd rather talk shit about you in front of you than behind your back, Wei Wuxian.”

Jiang Wanyin resisted the urge to snort and instead continued to eat. Jiang Yanli became aware of this reaction and smiled knowingly. Lan Qiren, on the otger hand, was tempted to chastise Wen Qing for using such a foul word, but everyone has been speaking foul words now. His reprimand will only pass her ears.

“Ouch, Qing-jie. You’re still so cruel to me.”

“Keep eating Wei Wuxian!”

Wei Wuxian laughed as Wei Changze offered his son a cloth to clean the sauce from the corner of his lips, which his son gratefully accepted.

“Everyone!” Baoshan Sanren called out, drawing everyone's attention to her. “While everyone is eating, I’ve decided to play the memory here, so enjoy the food well.”

“Yes, immortal!”

The screen appeared, and soon, the cultivators began to focus their attention on the memory while also eating their food.

The moon shines brightly as the Nightless City came into existence. The fires all over the city provided more light, but there was this eerie, chilling, sinister ambiance that would scare a cultivator off. Then before the massive doors were Wen Chao, head bowed lowly and kneeling respectfully.

“I’m sure it will be the end of the world before Wen Chao and the word ‘respectfully’ will fit him,” Mianmian hissed, recalling the time she was harassed by the said person. The nerve of this man.

As she said that, many believed her. Even Song Lan and Xiao Xingchen, who was not involved in the Sunshot Campaign and had not encountered Wen Chao yet believed her just based on how arrogant the said man is.

“Father,” Wen Chao called out, his voice quavering a bit. “At the archery match today, I was incompetent and brought shame to the Wen Clan. The other four clans conspired to trick me!” he lamely excused.

“Oh don’t put the blame on us, even at cheating you still failed,” Jiang Wanyin viciously remarked, earning a slight nod from Jin Zixuan.

“He’s so shameless making a poor-ass excuse like that,” a female cultivator commented. “Knowing Wen Ruohan, he probably knew.”

“Of course he did,” Jiang Wanyin interjected. “He’s far from stupid as his son.

“Let’s put that aside; Wei-xiong is just that great,” Huaisang added with a smile, and Wei Wuxian returned it, though a bit forced. He is still wary of his friend of course.

“How treacherous of them! I—”

He did not manage to finish his words when the massive wooden doors opened slowly. Looking up, Wen Chao’s complexion turned pale, the fear in his eyes was evident.

“That expression definitely fits him,” Jingyi mumbled, a satisfied smile graced on his lips. Even those who despised the man felt the same as him, though they chose not to express it too much.

Before Wen Chao was his Excellency, Wen Ruohan. The bright yellow lights behind him made his figure completely shadowed, but it was evident that he was looking down at his kneeling son.

As Wen Ruohan walked forward, Wen Chao's breathing became erratic. His Excellency walked past his son to look down at the dull field.

"Chao-er," Wen Ruohan began and Wen Chao immediately spun around, still kneeling in front of his father's back.

"Yes, father."

"He totally looks like a hurt puppy," Mianmian said, slightly pitying him for having such a horrible father. "Poor him."

This just shows how terrifying Wen Ruohan can be that even his sons are more than scared to make him upset. The abuse is totally evident in their household, otherwise, his sons would not have this feeling of death every time they face their father.

"The four clans have been extremely arrogant. It's about time to teach them what is order, and what is hierarchy," Wen Ruohan said, smirking.

Yu Ziyuan and Nie Mingjue seethed in fury that they nearly shattered their glasses. When were the four clans ever arrogant? Every order Wen Ruohan issued have been followed by the leaders of each clan despite not agreeing to it, fearing that he would order his men to destroy the clans. Well, they do not fear the man himself, but they fear the destruction of their sects and the deaths of their disciples. If they had enough power and people, they would have declared war on the Wen Clan long ago.

"I'd be surprised if Lan Xichen is the arrogant one," Jiang Wanyin said noncommittally, and Lan Xichen just forced a laugh.

A month later, the sky brightened and the memory was brought back to Cloud Recesses. Near the Orchid room, two brothers were meditating under a tree, their robes and hairs fluttering gently.

After an hour of meditating, Lan Wangji slowly opened his eyes and spoke, “Brother.”

“Yes?” Lan Xichen responded, his eyes still closed.

“Have you ever picked Lotus pods?”

“Oh my god, don’t tell me..” Mianmian giggled.

“Oh, A-Xian,” Jiang Yanli cooed.

“What?” Lan Xichen asked, perplexed as to why his brother is suddenly interested in Lotus pods. “No.”

Lan Wangji swiftly stood up, causing the other jade to open his eyes. “Brother, did you know,” he began, pulling out something from his sleeves, “Lotus Pods with stems have better seeds than those without?”

That something was a whole Lotus Pod stem!

Some cultivators couldn't decide whether to laugh or cry. Wei Wuxian burst out laughing, while Lan Wangji’s ears turned red from embarrassment. Just what the hell was he doing hiding a Lotus Pod stem in his sleeves?

“Wei Wuxian! W-What nonsense did you share with my nephew?!” Lan Qiren exclaimed, looking almost qi-deviating.

“Oh, Qiren, come on. My Wei Ying is simply passing on knowledge to your nephew, nothing dangerous!” Cangse Sanren defended, struggling not to laugh. Really, Lan Wangji is both easily influenced and adorable!

Jiang Wanyin let out an exasperated sigh, while Lan Sizhui and Wen Qing laughed.

Lan Xichen looked down at the stem, blinking in confusion before smiling and saying, "Really? Let me try."

He peeled off one Lotus seed and ate it until his face turned sour and his body hunched forward, clutching his stomach as if he's in pain.

"Oh shit, what's happening?!"

"Was it poisonous?!"

"Don't be ridiculous! They're not poisonous unless you ate the—" Jin Ling paused, his face turning horrified. "Oh no."

"What?!" All of the disciples yelled, as did Jin Zixuan and Nie Huaisang.

Lan Wangji gave his brother an apologetic look, which Lan Xichen dismissed with a smile.

Lan Xichen collapsed, his soul leaving his body.

"Brother, what is wrong with you?" Lan Wangji inquired, his hand outstretched in concern.

Then on the screen, it says, "Lotus seeds are edible only when they're ripe."

Many cultivators snorted and laughed as Lan Qiren massaged his temples, knowing that a full-blown headache would soon attack him. Lan Wangji's ears were dangerously red from embarrassment. He pondered whether the earth could swallow him up right now.

"Oh my god, Hanguang-jun!" The female cultivators wheezed. Like, how can the second jade be easily influenced by Wei Wuxian? He not only picked up a whole lotus stem, but also an unripe lotus pod!

"I guess this is a warning to not eat Lotus seeds until they're ripe," Lan Xichen giggled.

"Ah, Wangji, you're so adorable," Madam Lan cooed, pinching her second son's cheeks.

The scene darkened, and they were transported back to the library, where the twin jades sat facing each other once more. Xichen takes a sliced watermelon and eats it quietly.

Moments later, Lan Wangji then looked up and ask, "Brother, have you ever eaten watermelon rind?"

"Not this again!" Madam Jin exclaimed, an amused look graced on her face. It really is rare to see a cold, untouchable jade acting like this.

Wei Wuxian laughed again, hugging his husband tightly and looking up at him, "Lan Zhan, please never take my nonsense seriously; I'm afraid you'd endanger Zewu-jun's health sooner or later."

"Hmm," a hum that never indicates agreement or disagreement. Wei Wuxian could only sigh. Lan Xichen smiles at the scene before him. His brother had never shown any interest in the past, so it made him happy he shared it with him in this memory. Whatever his brother says, he will go to any length to make his brother happy, even if it means putting his own health at risk. In any case, his health is as strong as his golden core.

“No,” Lan Xichen responded. Then he inquires, “Watermelon rind is edible?”

“Yeah, is it edible? I feel like it’s not,” Jin Zixuan said, as Mianmian and Jiang Wanyin both rolled their eyes.

“You have no room to say that. You've never eaten a watermelon rind before, Zixuan,” Mianmian said, making the man blush.

Lan Wangji spoke, “I've heard that fried watermelon rind is very nice,” remembering exactly what the Jiang Head Disciple had said, and then placed the plate on the table with sliced watermelon rinds in a red sauce and lots of red chilies.

“Who eats watermelon with that many chilies?!” Nie Huaisang shrieked in shock, his face turning pale as he imagined the taste. The disciples who had been in Yi City felt their hair stand on end. That glutinous rice had too much spice on it, they felt like their entire bodies were on fire. They were never eating any glutinous rice if Wei Wuxian’s the one making it.

“This is literally food poisoning, Wei Wuxian! Stop influencing Lan Wangji!” Jiang Wanyin scowled; he could already taste the spiciness of that food just by looking at it, and knowing how many times he had been food poisoned by his brother sends shivers down his spine. His brother's spice tolerance is out of this world.

“I did not influence him!” Wei Wuxian insisted. “He just remembered the nonsense I spouted a long time ago!”

“It also helps beat the heat,” Lan Wangji added.

Jiang Yanli became concerned, “Ah, Zewu-jun, you might—”

“No! It increases the fucking heat!” Jiang Wanyin yelled, cutting off his sister's words, which drew a look from his mother and father.

“Okay, let me try it.” Lan Xichen said, taking his chopsticks and picking up one rind.

“Nooo!!!” All of the cultivators screamed, and Wei Wuxian sheepishly scratched the back of his neck.

Lan Wangji stares in anticipation, waiting for his brother to speak until he hears him cough.

“Br-Brother..”

“Hanguang-jun is literally killing his brother,” an unknown cultivator laughed.

“Be careful what you say now, Wei Ying. Lan Wangji might remember them and endanger Lan Xichen again,” Cangse Sanren giggles, ruffling her son’s hair.

“I will remember everything Wei Ying says,” Lan Wangji protested to Cangse Sanren's reminder, and Qingheng-jun and Madam Lan smiled and shook their heads.

Lan Xichen's face turns dangerously red as he coughs; a volcano erupting with red chilies metaphorically describes the level of spice and what Lan Xichen is currently experiencing.

The cultivators could only pity him for being subjected to Lan Wangji’s sudden interest.

“I apologize, Zewu-jun,” Wei Wuxian sheepishly turned to Lan Xichen.

“I apologize as well, Brother,” Lan Wangji saluted.

“There's no need to apologize; I'm just glad you suddenly became interested in things?” he said as if he was wondering if those were truly interests.

“You really are a good brother, Xichen,” Nie Mingjue commented in amusement. “If Huaisang had fed me something like that, I would have chased him and scolded him until midnight.”

Offended, Huaisang yelled, “Hey!”

Lan Xichen coughed continuously, and Lan Wangji became more concerned.

“Brother, are you okay?”

Pausing, Lan Xichen inquired, “Wangji, why are you suddenly interested in these things?”

Jiang Wanyin snorts, “Ask Wei Wuxian,”

The young Wei Wuxian then appeared on the screen. It was a flashback.

“Goodness, your house's food is truly appalling. I'd rather eat chili-fried watermelon rind.”

Lan Qiren was about to yell at him for insulting their food once more when another voice spoke.

“Yeah, a little street urchin. Well-behaved and likes to smile. Look, he’s arrived! Here.”

“Thank you!”

Right, street child Wei Wuxian never cared about the food he got to eat before he was taken by Jiang Fengmian. As long as his stomach is full, then he’s content. Watermelon rinds and steamed buns are probably his favorite foods and probably the best foods he’s ever eaten. Somehow, the air in the temple became dull.

Sure, Wei Wuxian told Lan Wangji that he likes watermelon rinds, but the manner in which he told him had to be as genuine as his smiles. It’s just that he simply decided to put chilies on his food.

Wei Wuxian, Cangse Sanren, and Wei Changze were yet again grateful to that kind man.

“Let me tell you, Lan Zhan, lotus pods with long stems have better seeds than those without, roosters that crow frequently are the most delicious, and black dogs are the most afraid of knockout drops!” Wei Wuxian’s voice reverberated before the scene darkened.

“I wouldn't be surprised if Hanguang-jun does all of those in a single day,” Jingyi shrugged as if he'd already accepted Lan Wangji's strange habit.

“Right, he’d certainly reach new heights just to do what Senior Wei says,” Zizhen said, his lips curved in a grin that made Jin Ling shudder.

“Oh, you'll see soon how Lan Zhan stole chickens from someone else's house while drunk,” Wei Wuxian revealed, causing Lan Qiren's jaw to drop and a gasp escape from the cultivators' mouths

“Drunk?!”

“He stole chickens?!”

Wei Wuxian smirk only grew wider; “Oh, and there’s more.”

Flabbergasted, they couldn't help but exclaim, “More?!”

Seriously, how many rules did Lan Wangji break?!

The screen lights up again. The Jiang disciples were lined up on the riverbank, their bows and arrows aimed upwards in deep concentration. The kite targets were at least twenty feet off the ground.

The Yunmeng Jiang known for their archery prowess, the cultivators will not be surprised if they hit those kites precisely, but Jiang Wanyin knew that only his brother, Wei Wuxian, could do it flawlessly without missing the target. The disciples, on the other hand, watched, scrutinizing the Jiang disciples' positions and movements.

“Without an adult, who is supervising them?” Song Lan wondered, noticing that neither Yu Ziyuan nor Jiang Fengmian was not at the scene.

“They’re just playing, Song Lan-xiansheng,” Jiang Yanli immediately responded before her mother could say anything else.

Jiang Wanyin stared fixedly at his own kite, occasionally glancing at Wei Wuxian's. Wei Wuxian's kite had already flown high in the sky, but he still had no intention of drawing his bow. With his right hand at his brows, he grinned as he looked up, as though he still felt that it was not far enough.

Ouyang Zizhen’s eyes twinkled in admiration, “That’s not far enough for you? I would’ve struggled to hit that, Senior Wei.” His senior’s confidence is really amazing.

“Yeah, like how do you even hit a kite that high?” Jingyi asked, while Jin Ling, trying so hard to hide his curiosity, turned his head to the side to look at Wei Wuxian.

Wei Wuxian chuckled, slightly flustered and smug, "Never think about how far your target is. The range of the target is not important, but how accurately you hit the target is. If you focus on the distance of the target, it not only disrupts your concentration, but it also disrupts your form. Form is an important factor in archery, so instead of worrying about the distance, think about the target as your goal."

"Yes, Senior Wei!"

Wei Wuxian then added, "For beginners, of course they are taught to stand relatively close to their targets until they are consistent enough. Do you understand?"

"Of course, Senior Wei!"

"Good!"

Cangse Sanren and Wei Changze's hearts were, yet again, filled with admiration and pride for their son. Wei Ying is so good that they wonder if he is truly their son. Lan Qiren, Lan Xichen, Qingheng-jun, and Nie Mingjue were equally impressed. Of course, there were those who were jealous of his abilities.

Seeing that the kite almost drifted out of the area where he was certain he'd succeed in shooting it down, Jiang Wanyin clenched his teeth. He positioned his arrow and drew the bow. The white-feathered arrow shot out. The kite pained like a one-eyed monster was pierced right through the eyes and fell downward. Jiang Wanyin's brows lifted.

"It hit!" he yelled.

Madam Yu gave his son a proud nod, because, of course, his son is just as good as everyone else. While Jiang Wanyin felt warmth in his heart at his mother's proud expression, his younger self might have bounced in joy and thanked the gods that he had received such praise from his mother, which rarely happens.

“Good job, A-Cheng,” Jiang Fengmian praised, and Jiang Wanyin smiled briefly before thanking both of his parents. Jiang Yanli, his sister, smiled at him. He then turned to face Jin Zixuan, and the world might want as well explode right now because his sister’s husband also gave him a proud nod. Jiang Wanyin wondered if he could hit his head somewhere hard because this was so out of character for the peacock, but he was happy regardless.

Jiang Wanyin turned to his brother, a smug smile on his lips, and asked, “Yours has flown so far already. You sure you can hit it?”

With a mischievous grin, Wei Wuxian responded, “Wanna guess?”

The head disciple finally pulled out an arrow and aimed. As the bow was drawn to the utmost, he swiftly let it go.

A hit!

There were whistles everywhere. Mianmian smiled at Wei Wuxian, to which the latter returned. Lan Wangji did not tighten his hold on his husband’s small waist. He did not.

The disciples, on the other hand, cheered and clapped, causing Madam Lan and Madam Jin to laugh at their enthusiasm.

Jiang Cheng’s brows scrunched up again. A humph came through his nose. All of the boys put away their bows and went to pick up their kites so they could rank the distances. The closest kite to the ground would receive the lowest ranking.

“Now I wanna play. This seems fun,” a Nie disciple mumbled.

“We could play, if Sect Leader Jiang allows us,” a Jiang disciple said as he was nudged on the shoulders by a friend.

“Sect Leader Jiang would never allow us.”

Jiang Wanyin pretended he hadn't heard anything.

Every time, the last one was the shidi who was the sixth eldest. As usual, they'd spend some time laughing at him. His face was quite thick, though, so he didn't care at all. Wei WuXian's was the farthest. The closest one to him, the one ranked second, was Jiang Cheng's kite. Both Wei WuXian and Jiang Cheng felt too lazy to go fetch the kites. The boys rushed into the winding hallway built over the water's surface. They were playing around, jumping up and down, as two young, slender women appeared before them.

Madam Jin and Yu Ziyuan are well acquainted with these two. If Jin Guangshan were still alive and present, he'd be gawking at them, and Madam Jin would have to punch him hard. Well, he’s not here now and never will be.

“They’re like Madam Yu, scary.”

“Maybe because they’re associated with her dipshit.”

Both of them were dressed as armed maids, carrying with them short swords. They were Jinzhu and Yinzhu. The taller maid, holding a kite and an arrow, blocked their path.

She asked coldly, “Whose are these?”

“They’re mine,” Wei Wuxian answered, stepping forward to keep his shidis out of trouble.

“Idiot,” Jiang Wanyin frowned, muttering, “Don’t take all the blame on yourself.”

The other maid snorted, “You’re an honest one, aren’t you?”

They parted and revealed between them a purple-clothed woman, also carrying a sword. Yu Ziyuan had come, the corners of her lips lay between a frown and a smile she was a natural at sneering, just like Jiang Cheng.

Jiang Cheng smiled as he saw her, “Mom!”

Meanwhile, the rest of the boys greeted her with respect, “Madam Yu.”

Even in the memory, Madam Yu is still frightening to the disciples' eyes. They were suddenly curious about her night hunts. Is she as fierce as Hanguang-jun, or even more so? Does she fight with ruthlessness or mercy? In any case, they were curious because Madam Yu in the memory appears to have just returned from a night hunt.

Yu Ziyuan nodded, seeing her disciples bow at her. This is exactly how they should behave! But why must her own grandson not bow to her or greet her as everyone should?

The Violet Spider from MeishanYu Sect, Yu Ziyuan gave Jiang Wanyin a sideways glance, “Fiddling about again? Come, let me see you.”

Jiang Cheng went to her side. Madam Yu squeezed his arm with her slender fingers, then slapped his shoulder loudly, scolding, “There isn’t any improvement in your cultivation at all. You’re seventeen already, yet you’re still like an ignorant child fooling around with others all the time. Are you the same as others? Who knows which sewers other people will be splashing in, but you’re going to be the leader of the Jiang Sect!”

Jiang Wanyin stumbled from the slap, head lowered, and not daring to protest.

It’s an undeniable fact that Yu Ziyuan is strict when it comes to her children, but the pressure she's putting on Jiang Wanyin may be too much. Pushing a child to excel at everything is detrimental to their self-esteem. The constant pressure to perform interferes with their

identity formation, making them feel like "they're not good enough—or even that they will never be good enough.'

These words are literally a constant reminder in Jiang Wanyin's head thanks to her mother's words.

“A-Niang, you did not have to be harsh on A-Cheng. He is trying every day to be better,” J Jiang Yanli said, her voice soft but with an edge that surprised Wei Wuxian, Jiang Wanyin, and Jin Zixuan.

Yu Ziyuan scoffed, “Trying to be better? Back in the day all he did is play and cause trouble with Wei Wuxian!”

“They’re children, Yu-furen. Let them be children until the time comes for them to be responsible adults,” Wei Changze stated coldly, finding it frustrating that she’s constantly dragging his son’s name every time.

“Also, you’ve seen what your disciples were up to earlier, Yu-furen. They were playing, but they were training as well,” Qingheng-jun added, also a bit irritated that she keeps belittling her own son. Ziyuan seems a bit caught off guard when the previous Lan Sect Leader spoke, as she looks at him with her lips gaping slightly. He had been silent for a while, and for him to speak, particularly to Yu Ziyuan, is rather astonishing.

One of his shidi secretly stuck out his tongue toward him on the side. Wei Wuxian raised his brow at his shidi, but Yu Ziyuan had already turned around to face him.

“Wei Ying, what trouble are you stirring up this time?”

Cangse Sanren felt the glass on her hand crack as she threw her a murderous glare; she despises her, she despises her so much! Why does she have to suspect her son every time something occurs?

“Calm down A-se,” Wei Changze whispered softly to his wife’s ears. “I know you’re angry. I, too share the same sentiment, but it would do no good if you decide to lash out again.”

Cangse Sanren sighed and set her glass down, clutching her husband's hand as if it were the only thing that will ground her right now.

Wei Wuxian, used to such accusations, stepped forward as the Violet Spider scolded, “You’re like this again! If you don’t seek progress, then don’t drag Jiang Cheng along to fool around with you. You’re going to be a bad influence on him.”

“Wei Wuxian must have used demonic cultivation on you, which is why you continue to protect him in this manner. Wangji, why must you let yourself be influenced by a person—”

“Wei Ying did nothing to me or influence me; I am acting according to what I believe is right,” Lan Wangji looked up at the Lan Elder, his gaze unrelenting and piercing, as if he were stabbing the elder with thousands of swords simultaneously.

Lan Wangji closed his eyes and took a deep breath. Wei Wuxian noticed this and gazed at his husband in concern, “Lan Zhan, is something wrong?”

“Wei Ying is not a bad influence,” Lan Wangji spoke with such conviction that Lan Qiren, Lan Xichen, Qingheng-jun, and Madam Lan all turned to him in astonishment.

“Lan Zhan—”

“No,” he said emphatically, turning to face the Violet spider with such intensity in his eyes. Yu Ziyuan was certain she was looking at Young Qingheng-jun in his prime when he actually snapped during a discussion conference. “Yu-Furen must be aware that Wei Ying has never influenced anyone for a bad cause. It is the people around him who chose to be influenced by him,” he concluded and saluted before turning back to his husband, who appeared to be looking at him with... desire.

Cangse Sanren will tackle her son-in-law with a hug later. She will.

Startled, Wei Wuxian said, “I don’t seek progress? Why, am I not the one with the most progress in the entire Lotus Pier?”

And they were reminded why they shouldn't question his progress. Whether he’s fooling around or secretly training, he's made more progress than any other cultivator. At this, Yu Ziyuan and a few other cultivators clenched their jaws.

“Senior Wei, please don’t provoke her,” Zizhen muttered quietly.

When Yu Ziyuan heard his response, a hostile expression appeared on her forehead. Jiang Cheng hastened, “Wei Wuxian, shut up!” Then he turned to his mother. “It’s not that we want to shoot kites in Lotus Pier, but right now, none of us are allowed to leave.”

“Why?” Nie Mingjue and Song Lan inquired at the same time.

“The Wen Sect has taken over all of the night-hunting areas, so even if I want to go, there isn't anywhere for me to go. Stay at home and don't go outside to provoke or fight for prey with the Wen Sect—isn’t this what you yourself made clear to father?”

“Tch, they are taking over the night-hunting areas like they own it. The audacity!” Madam Jin exclaimed, furious while shaking her head along with Mianmian.

Yu Ziyuan smirked bitterly, “I’m afraid that this time, even if you don’t want to leave, you’ll have to anyway.”

Jiang Cheng didn't understand. Madam Yu didn't pay them any more attention and walked through the hallway, holding her chin high. The two maids behind her shot Wei WuXian fierce glares and followed their mistress away. When evening came, they finally understood what his mother had meant.

On the screen, a text appeared and an unknown voice took over, “Xuanzheng Year 19, the year of Ji Mao, Qishan Wen Clan successively annexed Runan Wang Clan, Hedong Fu Clan, and dozens of other cultivation clans. Wherever dissent arose, bloodshed would follow.”

The atmosphere around the temple became tense. This memory is just as important as Wei Wuxian's, given that the disciples of this generation knew little about the Wen Clan, but the reminder that Wen Clan had not only destroyed the minor clans, but also the major clans, Gusu Lan and Yunmeng Jiang, fueled Nie Mingjue and Yu Ziyuan's rage.

“The cultivation clans kept silent in indignation, only to share their resentments secretly. In the same year, Wen Ruohan commanded his eldest son, Wen Xu, to aggressively intrude and burn down the Cloud Recesses.”

The scene shifts to the Cloud Recesses' library on fire.

Madam Lan couldn't help but sit up in shock. She knew the Wens would burn down the Cloud Recesses, but the sight of it terrified her. Several cultivators let out loud gasps in horror.

“Madam Lan, it’s okay,” Qingheng-jun says, “Wangji and Xichen are alright.”

Yes, she knew they'd be fine; Qiren would protect them both, but, “What about you? Is this the time when—” she stopped after seeing the look on his husband’s face. Yes, that look is enough for her to know what happened, and she sat down, a look of grief on her face. Cangse Sanren, Madam Jin, and Jiang Yanli were sad for her. Lan Xichen and Lan Wangji could only hold their mother's hands, while Lan Qiren had an unreadable expression on his face.

The cultivators were then transported to a different memory. Inside the dull room, a man is kneeling, his head hung low. The silence was almost deafening, but it was soon broken by a loud explosion and screams from outside. The kneeling man turned to face the door. This man was Qingheng-jun in seclusion.

Lan Xichen and Lan Wangji did not know what to feel when they saw their father's face. He's perilously thin. He had dark bags under his eyes and soulless eyes that looked similar to a dead person. Lan Xichen could see his father's misery through his brother when Wei Wuxian died, and he had to stop those memories from flashing back to his mind to prevent himself from crying.

A knock made Qingheng-jun flinch.

"Qingheng-jun," It was Lan Qiren, "the Wens have attacked Cloud Recesses. Wangji is fighting Wen Xu's people, and I forced Xichen to flee with the library's ancient scrolls. We're outmatched by them," Lan Qiren admitted with a heavy, strained sigh, "I ask of you only once, to come out of your seclusion and protect the Cloud Recesses with me, like the Sect Leader you are."

Despite the noises outside, Qingheng-jun made no move to open his door.

Wei Wuxian speculated that his wife's death had caused him to become this way, but he wasn't sure. It might be the opposite.

Madam Lan was torn between telling her husband to stay inside and going out to protect his home and their children, but both were futile. Her husband died anyway.

"Qingheng-jun!"

Lan Qiren's pleading voice made some cultivators clutch their chests in sorrow. Lans rarely express their emotions freely without regard for restraint and rules, but Lan Qiren was desperate. It was not the time to be concerned about the rules, and they all understood. Cangse Sanren, Jiang Fengmiand, Wei Changze, and Nie Mingjue sent both brothers a look of concern. Qiren wanted to wipe those emotions from their faces. He did not need their pity.

"Your children are in danger! Do you really wish for their death?!" Lan Qiren screamed, and the light returned to Qingheng-jun's eyes. He looked at the door in confusion and slowly stood up.

“Qiren?” he called, uncertain.

“Wait, did he not hear Grandmaster Lan?” A-Qing asked in bewilderment.

“Qingheng-jun was probably in a trance earlier,” Lan Sizhui responded, his brows furrowed in anxiousness.

When Qingheng-jun opened the door, he was met with heat, fire, fighting, and dying disciples. He was alarmed, and he turned to look at his brother, who shared his expression.

“W-What’s happening?! Why is everything burning?!”

“Wen Xu forced our people to burn down our own residence.”

The powerlessness to defend his sect and his people was clear in Lan Qiren’s face. Lan Sect would’ve been able to defend themselves if they came prepared, but who even informs a sect that they’ll be attacked if they want to take them down faster?

“Sect Leader,” Despite his animosity toward his brother, Lan Qiren forced himself to bow down to him. “I request that you fight alongside me to protect our sect.”

Qingheng-jun glanced back to where his sword hung. He seemed to hesitate, but the thought of his two sons injured increased his worry, and without a second thought, he went to grab it. “Lead the way.”

Then…

“The leader of Gusu Lan Clan, Qingheng-jun, was severely injured.” the voice revealed.

Everyone's heart sank. Madam Lan began to cry, and Qingheng-jun quietly consoled her.

“The eldest son, Lan Xichen, was nowhere to be found, and Lan Wangji…”

The memory changed, and Lan Wangji was limping in front of the blazing doors of the Library Pavilion, protecting it from Wen Xu's people. His body was trembling, his breath was strained and heavy, and his guqin lay broken on the ground. His pristine white robes were torn.

“Hanguang-jun!”

“Wangji!!” Madam Lan yelled, horrified at seeing her son injured. The tears kept falling as she refrained from fully weeping on her husband’s chest. Beside Lan Wangji, Wei Wuxian was trembling with rage. His red eyes continued to flicker as if he was trying to calm himself.

“Wen Xu,” He spoke in a dangerously low, cold, and murderous tone. Tendrils of resentful energy began to wrap around his right hand. Voices from the dead invaded his mind, urging him to exact vengeance on his husband, but Lan Wangji only held that hand tightly and whispered.

“Wei Ying,” a lovely, soft, fond tone that soothed Wei Wuxian.

“Lan Zhan, he—”

“It’s alright,” he reassured him. “I am here, safe.”

However, despite this, Lan Wangji's golden eyes shone with the most intensity and emotion anyone had ever seen from him. They radiated resolve and determination.

“That’s right, Hanguang-jun may be injured but he’s brave and strong!” Lan Jingyi exclaimed, and a slight upturn on the second jade's lips caused the disciple to preen in delight. He made Hanguang-jun smile!

“I am proud of you, A-Zhan,” Qingheng-jun said with a smile. “Thank you for protecting the library.”

“I failed, A-Die—” Lan Wangji responded, his head lowered in shame.

“No, you did not. You did your best,” Madam Lan insisted, gripping her son's hand even tighter as if she was afraid to let him go. As if he'll vanish at any moment.

“Wen Xu had his people, and you fought valiantly. You were still able to stand despite sustaining injuries,” Jiang Fengmian praised after overhearing their conversation. He turned his gaze to the second jade and gave a nod. “I say, they’re right, Hanguang-jun. You gave it your all.”

Lan Wangji could only express gratitude and bow. Wei Wuxian, seeing how his family and his uncle praise his husband, warmed his pitiful heart.

Then, the QishanWen Sect ordered envoys to pass out messages. For the reason that other sects taught badly and wasted talent, the Wen Sect demanded all of the sects to each dispatch at least twenty disciples to Qishan within three days, so that they could let experts teach them.

“What?! How dare they?” Xiao Xingchen exclaimed, standing up. Song Lan, Madam Lan, Cangse Sanren, and Wei Changze all expressed the same sentiment.

“T-They forced the Lans to burned down Cloud Recesses, and now they want their disciples to go to Qishan? What is Wen Ruohan thinking?!” spluttered a female cultivator, her fists shaking in rage.

“They’re literally sending the other clan’s disciples to their deaths!” Another man shouted.

Wen Qing and Wen Ning glared at the screen. They've heard from Wen Chao that he’ll be demanding the other sect’s disciples to lure them to a location where the legendary creature hides. Death will be inevitable if they try to fight that creature, and Wen Sect will be blamed for the disciples’ deaths. Both siblings were quietly opposed to this, but the words of opposition stayed within their tongues.

The Lotus Pier Main Hall was silent, until Jiang Wanyin spoke, “The Wen Sect’s people really said this? They know no shame, do they?’

Wen Qing, Wen Ning, and Lan Sizhui flinched and tried to hide it, but Jiang Wanyin saw it as clear as day. Why can’t his mouth just shut up!

Wei Wuxian merely shrugged, “Well, they think they're the sun shining above all sects. It's not the first time that the Wen Sect is so shameless. Taking advantage of their large sect and strong influence, it had been prohibiting the other sects from night-hunting ever since last year. Just how much prey and land do you think they’ve stolen?”

Jiang Fengmian was sitting at the foremost seat, and he frowned at Wei Wuxian’s words, “Watch your words and eat.”

The greater sects have always been cautious about speaking openly about issues concerning the Wen Sect, but despite being cautious and constantly refraining from acting recklessly that might provoke the Wen Sect, the minor sects have already been targeted and taken down. The fact that this indoctrination was not about teaching disciples a lesson and training them, but rather a planned strategy to use them as hostages. The heirs of the main clans are among the most powerful fighters in the cultivation world; taking them out first would be a wise strategy, leaving the main clans vulnerable with their heirs and disciples dead. Wen Ruohan executed this strategy well, but he failed.

There were only five people within the large hall. In front of everyone was a small, square table, on top of which were a few dishes of food. Head lowered, Wei Wuxian only had a few mouthfuls as somebody tugged at the corner of his sleeve. Turning around, he saw Jiang Yanli pass over a small dish. Inside the dish were a dozen peeled lotus seeds, soft and white, fresh and succulent.

Wei Wuxian's voice was soft, “Thank you, Shijie.”

Jiang Yanli sighed, watching the scene with fondness.

“How old are you, Xianxian?” Jiang Yanli asked.

Wei Wuxian grinned, “Xianxian is three years old!”

Jin Ling cringed, Jiang Wanyin rolled his eyes, while Lan Wangji smiled.

Jiang YanLi smiled. Those somewhat mild features immediately lit up with color. Yu ZiYuan spoke coldly, “Eat? A few days after this, when they're at Qishan, we won't even know if they give them any food. Why not go a few meals hungry starting from now? Let them get used to it!”

“What? You’re going to let your children and disciple starve?” Madam Jin inquired in disbelief. “Even if they’re at Qishan, you should let them eat to their heart’s content.”

Nie Mingjue concurred, “Starving them for a few meals won’t help them. Especially fighting the Wens.”

Yu Ziyuan was about to argue when her husband shook his head. So she scoffed and rolled her eyes, returning her gaze to the screen.

Jiang FengMian replied in a lukewarm voice, “Why fret over it? No matter what comes in the future, today's meal should still be eaten.”

Madam Yu was out of patience. She slammed the table, “I'm fretting? Of course I'm fretting! How can you still be so indifferent? Did you not hear what the person from the

Wen Sect said? A mere maidservant dares to hold up her head before me! The twenty disciples that are sent must include a disciple from the clan. Wen Ruohan is pushing his luck!"

It goes without saying that this demand of the QishanWen Sect was one that they couldn't turn down. Countless precedents could prove that if any sect dared defy their orders, it would be accused of strange things such as being 'rebellious' or 'destructive." And, with these as reasons, they would wipe it out fair and square.

Several cultivators cursed under their breath at the man's audacity.

"What does that mean? It means that between A-Cheng and A-Li, one of them must be included! Sent there to do what? To be taught? How each sect teaches their own disciples-since when is it the Wen Sect's turn to meddle?! This is sending people for them to play with, for them to hold against us!"

Jiang Cheng, "Mom, don't be so angry. I'll just go."

Madam Yu scolded, "Of course you'll go! Or else would your sister go?"

Jiang Yanli gave a bitter smile. She was born with only a few talents. She was not only unable to wield a sword and fight on a battlefield, but she also possessed low cultivation. If only she'd been gifted enough, her brother wouldn't have been forced to put himself in danger for her sake.

"A-Li, whatever you're thinking, stop that," Jin Zixuan interrupted her, making all her murky thoughts go away.

"Yes, of course, A-Xuan."

"A-Niang is perfect just the way she is!" Jin Ling exclaimed, his eyes gleaming with determination, and she couldn't help but laugh.

She then ruffles her son’s hair, “Thank you, A-Ling.”

When Yu Ziyuan noticed her daughter was occupied with something else, Yu Ziyuan scolded, “A-Li, stop peeling them. Who are you peeling them for? You're the mistress, not somebody's servant!”

“Neither is Wei Ying,” Lan Wangji and Nie Huaisang argued simultaneously. Nie Huaisang's gaze was not as stern as the second jade's, so after realizing what he had said, he cowered and hid behind his elder brother's body.

Yu Ziyuan glowered, “Wei Ying is not a member of our family, and he holds no position in our household, so who's to say he's not a ser—”

“A-Niang, stop it!” Jiang Wanyin exclaimed, a thick layer of hostility forming on his forehead. “Wei Wuxian will never be a servant; he has never been one!”

“Jiang Cheng,” Wei Wuxian called out, his voice soft and…..sad. Jiang Wanyin was not pleased to hear that tone.

“A-Cheng is right, A-Niang,” Jiang Yanli stepped in. “Please don’t refer A-Xian as a servant anymore.” *That word feels so insulting if you say it* was left unsaid.

“San-niang,” Jiang Fengmian warned.

“**What, is there something wrong with what I said?” she asked scornfully. “Servant.”**

“Oh, you fucking—”

Wei Wuxian, “Mother!”

“A-Se! Don’t!” Wei Changze yelled, clutching his wife's hand as she stood up, prepared to storm to Yu Ziyuan's place, and the Violet Spider glared back.

Jin Ling absolutely dislikes his grandmother. Why does she have to be so stern? Why does she feel the need to disparage that *servant* who has remained loyal and true to his sect? What did he do to deserve this kind of treatment from her?

Lan Sizhui is glaring from the corner, his hand gripping the hilt of his sword in an attempt to calm down.

“Now I am regretting why I thanked Jiang Sect for taking care of my child; Wei Ying does not deserve to be abused nor mocked for being a servant and for being my son! Yu-Furen, my husband is also a servant from your sect; did you also mock him for being one? Did you also mistreat him? Physically or mentally? Tell me the truth, because my husband will not answer me. I need an answer from you!” Cangse Sanren exclaimed, tears welling up in the corners of her eyes, tired and angry every time this woman hurls hurtful words at her son.

“A-Se, there’s no need—”

“No!” she interrupted. “I need to know, A-Ze!”

Yu Ziyuan scowled. “Why don’t you ask Jiang Fengmian about it? I rarely interact with your husband.”

“Then what about Wei Ying?”

“A-Niang,” Wei Wuxian pleaded.

“You know the answer to that, Cangse Sanren. Do not ask me again.”

Cangse Sanren was about to utter a word when Lan Qiren intervened.

“I hope you remember that we are in the middle of watching memories; resolve your issues later!” He scowled and sat back down in his seat, sipping his tea to calm his nerves.

Nie Mingjue and Lan Xichen are extremely fortunate not to have their own family, as the amount of stress they will experience will be unprecedented.

“You don't want to hear the word? Jiang Fengmian, let me ask you this time, do you intend to let him go?” Yu Ziyuan harshly inquired.

Jiang Fengmian, “It's up to himself. He can go if he wants to.”

Wei Wuxian raised his hand, “I want to go.”

“You’d let Wei-xiong go?” Nie Huaisang inquired. His expression was thoughtful. “You’d let him go even if he’s not an heir, Sect Leader Jiang?”

“It would be preferable if A-Cheng and A-Xian stick together.”

‘No, you're willing to send Wei-xiong as a hostage because he's not an heir,’ Nie Huaisang looks skeptically at Jiang Fengmian. *‘As for Jiang-xiong, he’s an heir, so he needs to go.’*

Nie Huaisang then huffs, drawing the attention of the cultivators. “As expected, I may be right,” he said, fanning himself.

“Right about what, exactly?” Jin Zixuan wondered.

“Well, from what I’ve observed, Wei-xiong is a Head Disciple tasked with keeping Jiang-xiong safe and sound. Jiang-zongzhu focuses more on Wei-xiong not because he is biased and he’s greater than Jiang-xiong, but he tends to get in trouble,” he explained while focusing on the expressions on the cultivators, “There’s an explanation why Jiang-zongzhu is rather strict with Jiang-xiong. It is because he is molding him to be the next Sect Leader, not because he does not value him as much as Wei-xiong.” he paused for a moment before he goes on.

“As you can see, Jiang-zongzhu may be giving Wei-xiong the option of deciding whether or not to go, but he actually wants him to go. He is aware that sending his heir to a dangerous location opens up numerous possibilities, but if Wei-xiong is there with Jiang-xiong, he will be there to protect him.” *‘Be a hostage so Jiang-xiong will be unharmed’* was left unsaid. He concluded, looking straight into Jiang Fengmian's eyes. “Oh, and there's more: Jiang-zozhu appeared relieved that Jiang-xiong did not place in the top five in the archery competition. I assumed you were relieved because that means he will receive less attention from the greater sects as well as the Wen Sect.”

‘Which means the less attention he gets from the enemy, the greater the chances of his survival, his safety,’ the cultivations realized.

“Did I figure out enough, Jiang-zongzhu?” Nie Huaisang inquired, but the cultivators remained speechless, Wei Wuxian appeared to be aware of his friend's speculation.

Yu Ziyuan and Jiang Wanyin stared at Jiang Fengmian in disbelief.

This Nie Huaisang is truly a menace to society.

“Is that true, father?” Jiang Wanyin inquired, his breath shaky; had his father cared for him since then?

“T-That’s true,” Jiang Fengmian stuttered, then puzzledly looked at Nie Huaisang, “but how did you—”

Nie Huaisang shrugged, “It's not difficult to connect the dots, and I believe Wei-xiong is already aware of this, am I right?”

Instead of responding, Wei Wuxian avoided eye contact and remained silent.

“Wow, Nie-zongzhu could possibly figure out my future,” Jingyi muttered, and Lan Sizhui silenced him by slapping his hand to his friend's mouth. The tension is so high right now that Jingyi's nonsense could exacerbate it.

Yu Ziyuan laughed harshly, "How wonderful. He can go if he wants to. If he doesn't want to, it's definitely possible for him to stay. Why is it that A-Cheng has to go no matter what? Raising someone else's child with such passion, Sect Leader Jiang, you really are a very nice person!”

Jiang Fengmian sighs, suddenly tired, "My lady, you're tired. Why don't you go back and rest?"

‘Ah, what a terrible match,’ Wen Qing observed quietly.

Jiang Cheng stands up as he looked up at her, "Mom."

Yu Ziyuan stood up and mocked, "What do you want me to do? Like your father, you want me to hold my tongue? You really are an idiot. I've told you long ago that you'll never in your whole life be able to surpass the one sitting beside you. Not over cultivation, not overnight hunting, even over shooting kites, you can't surpass him! It can't be helped!”

It was as if she was not only speaking to Jiang Wanyin, but also to everybody inside this temple.

Jiang Wanyin shifted in his seat, and Jin Ling despised seeing his uncle in this state. She consistently shattered her son's self-confidence, whereas other parents would encourage their

children to do better. He desperately wants to say something just to get his grandmother to stop, but arguing with a vicious adult like her is pointless, and his fragile heart can't take any hurtful words from her. He is already in pain from hearing his grandmother disparage his uncle, how much more if she starts belittling her own grandson?

“You did not need to say all of that, Ziyuan,” Madam Jin said, her tone firm. “What do you gain by undermining your son's self-confidence? Do you think it will motivate him to do better?”

“What benefit do I get? With my words, I am certain he’ll train harder to—”

“That’s not how you do it, Ziyuan,” Madam Jin interrupted, massaging her temples. “God, you're terrible at this.”

Yu Ziyuan, enraged, was about to speak when Lan Qiren glared at her, and she realized he had cast a silencing spell on her.

“That’s enough, San-niang!” Jiang Fengmian snapped.

Looking back at her husband, she let out a self-deprecating laugh, “Right, Who could change the fact that your mom is worse than another's?”

Wei Wuxian flinched.

“Worse it is, then. Your mom feels injustice for you, tells you countless times not to fool around with him, yet you're still defending him. Just how did I give birth to a son like you?!"

The cultivators really pitied Jiang Wanyin. He did not deserve his mother's hurtful words. These words will undoubtedly be the start of his self-deprecation and inferiority complex. Cangse Sanren, on the other hand, laughed bitterly. Is she the other mother she’s referring to?

“Well, with Wei Wuxian’s core—” an unknown cultivator began before Wen Qing slapped her hand to his mouth and glared at him.

“Say another word, and I'll inject hundreds of needles all over your body,” she threatens, and the man, scared of the needles, immediately nods his head.

Wei Wuxian smiled at her, grateful for what she had done. He couldn't afford to explain to the Jiangs or to his parents about his sacrifice yet.

Yu Ziyuan studied the man, wondering what he would say about Wei Wuxian's core.

She walked out, alone, leaving Jiang Wanyin standing there. Wei Wuxian turned around to look at his brother in concern. His complexion switching between purple and pale. His body trembled as his face was flooded with emotions.

With a tired sigh, Jiang Fengmian spoke, “Let’s eat now.” Moments later, he added, "Tonight, I'll count eighteen more people. You'll depart together the next day,"

Jiang Wanyin nodded, unsure whether he should say anything else. He never knew how to converse with his father, while Wei Wuxian was proficient.

“A-Cheng, know that you should not be afraid to speak to me about the things you want to share with me. I may not have paid much attention to you in the past, but I am willing to listen now,” Jiang Fengmian said, and Jiang Wanyin felt his heart warm as the weight on his shoulders was gradually lifting.

“I will, A-Die.”

Jiang Yanli was pleased for his brother.

Finishing his soup, he replied, “Uncle Jiang, don't you have anything to give us?”

Jiang Fengmian smiled, “I've given them long ago. Your swords are by your side, and the adage is in your hearts.”

Wei WuXian, “Oh! To *'attempt the impossible'*, right?”

Many smiled seeing how Wei Wuxian easily grinned after all that arguing. Wei Wuxian really took the Jiang motto to heart and accomplished the impossible.

Jiang Cheng immediately warned, "This doesn't mean that you should stir up trouble even though you know that you'll make a mess!"

The tension between them finally dissipated.

The world around them faded to reveal a clear sky. Wen flags fluttered in the breeze, and dozens of disciples (hostages) gathered in a field under the care of the Wen Sect. Unlike in the archery competition, where they wore red and gold robes, they wore their own sect color robes, and unlike in the archery competition, they carried their swords instead of the bow and arrow. Around the field, Wen disciples serve as guards and lookouts.

Wei Wuxian glanced around and frowned, “Even female cultivators are sent here. The Wen Clan is being unreasonable.”

“Wait what?!” A female cultivator exclaimed in shock.

“F-Female Cultivators?!” The disciples spluttered.

“That’s right. There were numerous female cultivators there. I, included,” Mianmian revealed, causing the cultivators to whisper several curses. Mianmian then smiled at Jiang

Yanli, “I'm glad you weren't there, Jin-guniang.”

“Yes.” She responded, her breath heavy. She has absolutely no idea what is going to happen. All she knows is that her brothers were hurt and that her A-Xian did not escape with her A-Cheng.

Wei Wuxian looked at his brother's back, puzzled, as Jiang Wanyin only hummed. Then someone entered the pavilion. It was not Wen Ruohan, but Wen Chao. His steps and walk were not as graceful as his father's, which were not only elegant and graceful but also calculated and intimidating. Wen Chao then collapsed down to the seat with a groan, his feet on the table before him; unlike his father, who sweeps his robes out of the way and sits down, his posture is similar to that of the immortal.

How fortunate that he did not achieve immortality. Who knows what will happened if he did.

Chuckling, he reached out and pulled a woman to his side. Wang Lingjiao was her name, a servant from the recently conquered Wang Clan. Soon to be a concubine of Wen Chao.

Immediately, the cultivators' faces turned disgusted and cringed as they witnessed the couple shamelessly being intimate in front of so many disciples.

“That’s her?” muttered a female cultivator, disgusted. “She’s not even pretty.”

“Hush now,” an older female cultivator reprimanded. “It is wrong to discriminate against another woman.”

“Who is that woman?” Wei Wuxian inquired while Nie Huaisang is hiding behind his back.

Nie Mingjue raised an eyebrow at his brother's unusual behavior and inquired, “What are you even hiding for?”

“Actually,” Nie Huaisang paused. “I don’t know.”

Nie Mingjue sighed and rolled his eyes.

“Her name is Wang Lingjiao,” Nie Huaisang responded, peering out behind his friend’s back. “She used to be a maid of Wen Chao’s wife, but Wen Chao is a lecherous one. So, you know…”

Madam Jin’s unconcealed anger made everyone shiver. “Shameless bastard,” she cursed, her hands shaking uncontrollably as she tried to calm her nerves. “He and Jin Guangshan both deserve to go to hell.”

“Mother, please calm down—”

“I am calm, A-Xuan.”

‘Your face says otherwise,’ everyone thought simultaneously.

“Sect Leader Nie,” a Nie disciple whispered to Nie Huaisang’s side. “How do you know so much about everyone?”

“I don’t know,” he responded, but they already knew the answer; they just asked him anyway.

Despite having his concubine by his side, Wen Chao's gaze wandered around the field, and in the field, he found a beautiful woman in pink robes looking around anxiously.

Madam Jin growled, “Luo Qingyang?”

Noticing Wen Chao's attention was somewhere else, she followed his gaze and frowned.

"Is he…" Madam Lan trailed off, and Mianmian's sigh made Madam Jin glower.

Wei Wuxian huffed a laugh as he stared between Wen Chao's object of attention and Wang Lingjiao, "This maid seems like the petty type."

The majority of the women in the temple did not hide their absolute disgust. This woman really has no shame hanging off an heir like Wen Chao while her robes barely cover her chest. Not only that, but she has the audacity to be jealous of Mianmian, as if she intends to steal her man. Wen Chao is no loyal man; he will be attracted to every beautiful woman he sees.

"He is really disgusting," Jingyi cringed, and Zizhen nodded, agreeing with his friend.

"He is. He isn't even good-looking," Lan Sizhui, for the first time, did say something bad that shocked Jingyi, Zizhen, and Jin Ling, and when Sizhui realized what he said, he clamped his mouth shut.

"Did you just—Oh my god!" Jin Ling laughed, as did Jingyi and Zizhen.

"Stop laughing, Jin Ling," Lan Sizhui whispered, embarrassed as he turned to face his Grandmaster, but he didn't seem to hear him, or he chose to ignore his words. Wei Wuxian, on the other hand, is looking at him in amusement.

"I apologize," he said as he bowed to Lan Wangji and Lan Xichen.

"It's alright, Sizhui," Lan Xichen reassured.

At the sound of someone coughing behind him, Wei Wuxian turned around. Lan Wangji was among the Lan disciples, and for the first time, he stood with a slight hunch, his

hands clenching the fabric of his robes. It was clear that he was in pain.

The hearts of Qingheng-jun and Madam Lan sank. Looking back, their son had been fighting Wen Xu's people, and with their eldest son on the run, their youngest son, whose injuries had not yet healed, was forced to go. Lan Qiren could've refused Wen Sect's request, but he had to send his nephew to Qishan for the sake of Gusu Lan Sect's safety.

"Oh no," A-Qing muttered, her face flushed with worry.

"What's wrong with Hanguang-jun?!"

"Those from Gusu Lan Clan do not look well," Wei Wuxian observed with a deep frown. But before he could go over to Lan Wangji's side, Wen Chao had already directed the announcer to stand up and repeat his words.

"Hand over your swords one by one," the announcer commanded. "Get started now!"

"What?!" Song Lan gasped out in disbelief. "They're taking swords now?!"

"Now that's out of the line!" Jin Ling exclaimed. "Their swords are their only protection!"

A large number of cultivators agreed with the current Jin Sect Leader.

"How low of you, Wen Chao," Wen Qing whispered lowly.

"What? Hand over our swords?"

The mumbles became incomprehensible, but it was clear that they were expressing their complaints and discontent

Then, a brave Jin disciple exclaimed, “How can we give up our swords like this?!”

Jiang Wanyin felt the same sentiment, saying, “This is outrageous!”

Then, another disciple stepped forward, a Nie disciple to be exact, and protested, “A cultivator stands with his sword, always! Why should we hand over our swords to you?”

“That’s right!” Nie Mingjue exclaimed, and a wave of pride washed over him; this is how Nie disciples should behave: speaking up and standing up when there is injustice.

Then, Nie Huaisang’s eyes widened, “Wait, that’s Huang Xiujing!”

Recognizing the name, Nie Mingjue felt his heart drop to the ground. “Then he is the disciple who Wen Zhuliu..”

Nie Huaisang gasped out a heavy sigh, “Yes.”

Wen Chao was in the middle of feeding Wang Lingjjiao a fruit. When he heard the disciple, he scowled and demanded, “Who was the one that spoke?”

Instead of backing down, the Nie Disciple glared back. Wen Chao glanced behind him and nodded to the man.

All of the cultivators paled, their blood turning ice.

“Wen Zhuliu!!”

“That’s Wen Zhuliu?!” Jingyi exclaimed, shuddering at the sight of the man. “That infamous Core-Melting Hand, Wen Zhuliu?!”

“Yes, that’s him,” Wei Wuxian responded coldly.

Wen Zhuliu leaped forward and landed in front of the Nie disciple. Before the Nie disciple could move, he had already raised his hand, purple energy circulating around his arm, and struck the Nie disciple in the chest with his palm, sending him flying.

“Nooo!!!” The cultivators screamed; their faces became paler as their hearts beat abnormally.

Just the sight of Wen Zhuliu made Jiang Wanyin shake in fear and anger. Memories flashed through his mind. If only he had listened to his brother, his core would have remained intact.

Lan Wangji wasted no time and caught the disciple, wincing when he applied too much force to his injured leg.

While Madam Lan and Wei Wuxian were too worried for Lan Wangji, the others were too concerned for the Nie disciple. Nie Mingjue growled, not bothering to hide his rage. His disciple did not deserve that. Huang Xiujing was one of the most talented Nie disciples he had, and now he cannot cultivate the sword path anymore without his golden core.

“Mingjue,” Lan Xichen called out softly. “I know you're upset, but please calm down; it's not good for your health.”

He forced himself to calm down in the presence of his sworn brother and his brother's worried expression. His rage is now pointless. What's done is done, and he can't change it.

Wei Wuxian dashed to the Nie disciple's side before Jiang Wanyin could say anything.

“Wei Wuxian, wait!”

Wei Wuxian knelt next to Lan Wangji as the disciple let out a pained gasp, clutching his chest in pain.

The screen went black, and a ball of golden light floated in the darkness. It was a golden core, the golden core of the Nie disciple. The core was then surrounded by purple tendrils, attacking it until the core shattered into dust in seconds.

The Nie Disciple screamed and fell to the ground. The disciples were stunned; no words had come out of their mouths.

The cultivators mirrored their reaction.

Wen Zhuliu possesses the unique ability to destroy a cultivator's golden core with his bare hands. Once melted, the victim's core can never be restored. Wen Ruohan frequently employs his core-melting ability to aid his oppression of opposing clans, earning Wen Zhuliu a fearsome reputation. At some point in time, Wen Zhuliu was appointed as the personal bodyguard of Wen Ruohan's youngest son, Wen Chao.

Wei Wuxian is well aware that Wen Zhuliu dislikes arrogant, cruel personalities; he witnessed this firsthand on Dusk Creek Mountain, and he respects powerful cultivators, even if they are his opponents. The only drawback is that his devotion to Wen Ruohan outweighs his own principles.

“I am so glad he’s dead,” Jin Ling shuddered in fear.

“Yeah,” Zizhen agreed. “Who knows how many gold cores he could've melted if he'd been alive at the time?”

“He’s terrifying, but I think his power is so cool,” Jingyi muttered, and his friends, Jiang Wanyin included, glared at him.

“But that's just my opinion! I do not wish to have that kind of power!” Jingyi had to defend himself before he received more glares from others.

Wei Wuxian grabbed the unconscious Nie disciple's wrist to look for something, then gasped in shock when he couldn't find it.

“H-His golden core….was melted away!”

Everyone sucked in a breath.

Losing a core at the hands of Wen Zhuliu is as traumatic as witnessing the deaths of your parents. The manifestation of golden cores takes time; developing and improving them takes years; this is what cultivators work on every day to become powerful and useful to their sect. Working so hard to perfect your power only to lose it means losing your power, reputation, rank, future, half of your soul, and, from Jiang Wanyin’s experience, your will to live.

Golden cores are what provide them warmth when the cold takes over. Furthermore, a cultivator’s injuries heal rapidly because of it. Golden cores became a part of themselves. Without it, an individual can only be a low-end cultivator.

Who wants their cores destroyed or melted away? Who can endure the hollowness in their chests? That constant thrum of power and life to be gone? No one but one person…

Wei Wuxian…

“This is too horrible,” an old cultivator shivered as he tried to put himself in the shoes of that disciple.

“I can’t imagine being mediocre for all my life,” the other cultivator said, hugging himself.

Lan Wangji clenched his teeth and glared at the two men. “Stop. Talking.”

The two men shut up.

“Core—Core-Melting Hand!” A disciple screamed in horror. “It’s Wen Zhuliu!”

Wen Chao cackled with delight, “Now, who dares to defy my orders?” He demanded. “It’s exactly because of disciples like you who know nothing of compliance or humility, whose cores are utterly rotten that I’m determined to indoctrinate you.”

Jin Zixuan, Jiang Wanyin. Jin Zixuan, and Lan Wangji all glared up at Wen Chao as if they were prepared to take action against the Wen Clan.

“If your manners aren’t corrected early on, some of you might attempt to challenge the authority and climb above Wen Clan’s head.”

“That’s a nice suggestion,” Cangse Sanren smiled scornfully. “I’ll definitely do that with no shame if I were alive.”

Lan Qiren and Jiang Fengmian both turned to face her. Knowing their friend’s mischievous and shameless nature, they do not doubt she’ll do it.

“Have you gone mad?!” Lan Qiren scoffed. “Do not say nonsense if you are aware of the consequences!”

“Still cannot take a joke?” Cangse Sanren rolled her eyes. “As if I’d actually do it. I value my life you know.”

Jiang Fengmian sighs, “This is not the time to joke around, Cangse Sanren.”

Cangse Sanren scoffed, and Yu Ziyuan nearly opened her mouth when she realized the silencing spell had not yet been dispelled. She could only glare at her at the moment.

Wei Wuxian's frown deepened, and before he could take a step forward, Jiang Wanyin was there to stop him, whispering, “Don’t stir up trouble. Countless masters were defeated by Wen Zhuliu’s core-melting technique. Do you want to court your own death?”

Wei Wuxian considered his words and did nothing.

This is actually the first time they've seen Wei Wuxian listen to his brother without saying anything. If only he listened to him more in the future..

“Now hand over your swords!” Wen Chao demanded once again.

A Wen disciple approached Wei Wuxian, holding out his hand and saying, “Your Sword!”

Wei Wuxian stared between his sword and the man before him, his uncertainty visible. However, seconds later, he held his sword out, frustrated at his own powerlessness, and glared at the ground.

Normally Wei Wuxian would start a fight before deciding what to do next, but knowing he was in the territory of a dangerous clan and knowing the consequences of his actions, he refrained from doing so. The Wei Wuxian who enjoys arguing with others and this powerless Wei Wuxian were so totally different from each other.

The disciples felt strange. It’s so unlike for their Senior Wei to remain silent because they're used to him arguing with people (he even argued with an old man concerning a potato). But in this case, they understood perfectly why he had to, but it's still strange.

When it was Jiang Wanyin's turn, he tightened his grip on Sandu, the hesitancy in his eyes was clear. The Wen disciple struggled to get the sword out of his hands, but Jiang Wanyin eventually let go, having no choice but to obey Wen Chao's orders. Then, another Wen disciple stepped into Huaisang's space to take his sword, and as expected, he handed his sword with no complaints, smiling as he did.

'But of course, he'll hand his sword with no problem,' the cultivators thought at the same time, glancing at the current sect leader.

Nie Mingjue sighed, but out of all the disciples, his brother was definitely the least concerned about his sword being taken. But he was still worried inside; his brother, along with the rest of the disciples and heirs, had been trapped inside the Dusk Creek Mountain by a legendary creature, with no weapons to defend themselves.

He moved his gaze to his younger brother, who avoided eye contact by covering half of his face with his fan. He was not glaring at his brother; he wasn't, but Nie Huaisang thought otherwise.

The one who was angry the most is Jin Zixuan. He'd never felt so powerless in his life (he was the Jin Sect heir, so he had many advantages); heck, he'd never even been humiliated by having to hand over his sword, which was his only source of defense and protection. When Wen Zhuliu approached, he handed over his sword without complaint.

If it hadn't been for Wen Zhuliu's dangerous technique and presence, he would've killed Wen Chao on the first day.

"You should've done it," Wei Wuxian smirked. "I would have backed you up."

Jin Zixuan rolled his eyes, "Yeah, and put myself and the rest of Jin disciples in danger? No thank you."

"Tch."

Wei Wuxian glanced back at the second jade, worried. He originally thought Lan Wangji would definitely refuse to hand it over. Unexpectedly, even though his face was frighteningly cold, he unstrapped his sword and handed it over anyway.

“How could he be so obedient?” Wei Wuxian wondered.

“What, do you expect him to rebel?” Jin Ling deadpanned.

"I at least expected him to say something like *'unrighteous*, *'pathetic'*, or something," Wei Wuxian said, putting his hand on his chin.

“Gongzi, all swords are surrendered here.”

“Good,” Wen Chao smirked. “Distribute the stuff to them.”

Instantaneously, a booklet was thrust into Wei Wuxian’s chest. He grabbed it, blinking several times before reading the title, *‘Wen Clan Essence Collection’*.

“Wen Clan Essence Collection is a collection of proverbs from the clan leaders and famed gentlemen of Wen,” Wen Chao explained. “From now on, this is the only criterion for your conduct and cultivation. Everyone must recite it fluently and always keep it in mind! I will demand someone recite it at sunrise and noon from this day forward; those who refuse or are unable to recite will be punished in accordance with the Wen Clan's rules. Begin now!”

“With that book’s thickness, I’m certain there are thousands of proverbs in there,” Nie Mingjue’s brows twitched in irritation.

“No one would be able to recite it all in one day,” Lan Xichen said, looking at his brother's slouched form. He had no doubt that his brother would not memorize the contents of that

booklet, but given his injured state and refusal to read it, punishment would be unavoidable, and that’s the last thing Lan Xichen wants to see.

“Does every disciple need to know what’s in that book?” A-Qing wondered. “I don't think it'll be as useful as it should be.”

“Oh, it will be,” Mianmian smiled, then glanced at Wei Wuxian. “It'll be as useful as it should be.”

The disciples and A-Qing stared at her in confusion.

Unlike other disciples, Wei Wuxian can immediately digest new information and texts, and it becomes ingrained in his mind, but he prefers to joke around and pretend he doesn't remember anything.

Somewhat hesitant, the disciples began to open the booklets Jiang Wanyin began reading, while Wei Wuxian casually flipped through the pages without care.

Yu Ziyuan and Lan Qiren frowned, wondering why he wasn't reading it like the others.

“Even these gibberish are considered proverbs?” Wei Wuxian observed.

Lan Qiren frowned, “Undisciplined bra—”

“Whatever is in there, I agree,” Jingyi concurred, nodding. Lan Qiren glared at his own disciple, who didn't seem to notice.

Sizhui huffed, “Jingyi, you have no idea what kind of proverbs are in there.”

“Well…proverbs,” Jingyi deadpanned.

He kept flipping through, barely reading anything from each page, until he came to a halt to look at a specific phrase that piqued his interest. A wry grin crept across his lips.

“This one is not that bad.”

Back at the Lotus Pier, the flags fluttered in the strong wind. Inside the Main Hall, Jiang Yanli is seated in her seat, eating in silence, then she glanced at either empty seat next to her.

Wei Wuxian, Jiang Wanyin, and Jin Zixuan all turned to face Jiang Yanli, who was smiling. Both brothers and Jin Zixuan were sad for her; imagine how lonely she felt without her brothers and not knowing what was going on at Qishan.

Jin Ling noticed his younger mother's sad expression and moved closer to her, and Yanli immediately hugged him.

“I wonder how A-Cheng and A-Xian are doing,” she asked her father.

“Don’t worry too much,” he reassured. “The disciples of Jiang Clan are not so vulnerable that they can’t even stand a little storm outside.”

‘Don’t worry?!’ Yu Ziyuan growled in her head, still unable able to speak. ‘*Your son is in our enemy’s territory! Ugh! Why are so calm about this, Jiang Fengmian?!’*

Wen Chao’s ‘special education’ turned out to be more than just memorization. During night-hunts, he would bring the disciples with him and make them run at the very front. They’d scout the path, distract the demons and bests, and battle with all their effort, while he appeared at the last moment and easily knocked down the prey that had already been beaten to a pulp by others.”

The memory of all disciples fighting the beasts and demons with their bare hands appeared. With Lan Wangji demonstrating his strength and power despite his injuries, Wei Wuxian and Jiang Wanyin demonstrating their agility by dodging, tumbling, and jumping on higher ground, and Jin Zixuan demonstrating his combat prowess, the beasts and demons were on the verge of being defeated, until Wen Chao appears, carrying his own sword and confidently slaying the prey.

“He tasked his men to take the disciples' swords, but the entire time he had his own?” Wei Changze scowled. That was completely unfair to the disciples, who had worked tirelessly to beat the prey with only their own hands. Does he not feel shame for showing up at the last minute?

“What do you expect? It’s Wen Chao,” Nie Mingjue glared at the screen. He can even see his younger brother cowering on the sidelines while the other disciples battle the prey with all their might. “Apparently he can do whatever he wants because he’s Wen Ruohan’s son.”

After he slayed the prey, the other Wens congratulated him.

“The prey has been dispatched thanks to Gongzi's incredible sword skills!”

“Gongzi is truly incredible!”

“Oh, It’s was so easy!”

“They’re really feeding his ego so well,” Jiang Fengmian sighed, turning to face his son and Wei Wuxian, who were both breathing heavily while glaring at Wen Chao’s back. Right after witnessing this scene himself, how did his past self remain calm again? This is extremely concerning and alarming.

“He really is a shameless, arrogant man,” Jin Ling whispered.

“A-Ling, don’t say that,” Yanli chastised, yet she knew herself that her son’s judgement was correct.

“Sorry, A-Niang.”

Wen Chao turned around to face Jin Zixuan and mocked, “Can’t handle such a weak monster huh? Aren’t you supposed to be a skilled archer?”

“How dare you!” Madam Jin and Jin Ling both exclaimed simultaneously.

At the same time, Jin Zixuan became enraged, “You—”

“Zixuan, let it go,” a Jin disciple whispered, holding his arm back to keep him from approaching Wen Chao. “It’s not worth it.”

Last year, while attending the Discussion Conference of the QishanWen Sect, Wen Chao bragged that he'd win first place in the archery competition. However, he was disqualified before doing so, and Lan Xichen, Jin Zixuan, Wei Wuxian, and Lan Wangji made it to the top four. Lan XiChen was not present this time, so he fixated on the other three, scolding them every day, exhibiting his power and authority.

Qingheng jun's face became cold and dark. His son was in pain, but he was forced to fight and overexert himself with no rest, doing his best to obey Wen Chao's orders despite his hesitancy and stubbornness. Not only that but he's being chastised and for what? For placing in the top rank he failed to achieve so? The jealousy of this gongzi is making him laugh. Absolutely ridiculous!

Yu Ziyuan and Jiang Wanyin frowned at the reminder that he had not finished in the top five, but they were also reminded of Nie Huaisang's earlier words. Wen Chao, unlike the other three, is not specifically targeting Jiang Wanyin; in fact, he pays little attention to Jiang Wanyin at all which is a good thing.

They traveled from forest to forest, barely stopping to rest.

“Hurry up,” Wen Zhuliu ordered while Wen Chao moved on to his next target. Even the arrogant and spoiled Jin Zixuan wanted to disobey, but would not risk provoking such a dangerous person. Wen Zhuliu is truly the ideal guard dog for Wen Ruohan.

Lan Wangji, on the other hand, appeared to be in a state of absolute difference and inner peace, as if his soul had already risen out of his body. He never reacted to Wen Chao's provocative words, nor did he allow them to influence him. In any case, that's where he excels.

“Yes!” The disciples cheered. “Go Hanguang-jun!”

“That’s how you do it!”

Finally, Wei Wuxian had been through years of Madam Yu's diverse methods of scolding when he was at Lotus Pier. He only cackles in amusement whenever Wen Chao attempts to humiliate or threaten him, hardly blinking an eye at such moments.

Wei Wuxian's unwavering confidence once again impressed many cultivators. He had endured so many hardships and scolding at Pier that his mental fortitude had grown stronger than a rock. Most disciples his age would have been terrified of being scolded, but Wen Chao’s words of provocation and threats were nothing to him. Any cultivator would surely have a difficult time chastising him in the future. Wei Wuxian would either take their scolding as a joke or mock them with it. In some ways, they are the same as Lan Wangji.

Not easily swayed by words..

“A perfect pair indeed,” Lan Xichen whispered.

Today, as usual, the group was hustled awake by the Wen Sect's disciples again. They were herded like cattle toward the next location of their night-hunts, which this time

was called Dusk-Creek Mountain.

The cultivators immediately sit up straight.

The deeper they went into the forest, the thicker the branches over their heads became, and the larger the shadows below them grew. Aside from the sounds of leaves and footsteps, they couldn't hear anything else. The calls of birds, beasts, and beetles were unusually perceivable amid the silence. After a while, the group met with a creek. Scattered throughout the gurgling water were maple leaves that floated along. The harmony of the sound and the sight imperceptibly diluted the atmosphere of desolation.

Wei Wuxian and Jiang Wanyin walked around hurling insults at the wen-dogs in every way they could. Inadvertently, he turned around and noticed a figure dressed in white. Lan Wangji was not far behind him.

Due to his slow pace, Lan Wangji was toward the back of the line. He kept his expression as blank as possible, but Wei Wuxian noticed that although he tried to walk as normally as possible, one could still see that his right leg contacted the ground lighter than his left, as though he couldn't put any pressure on it.

“Go help him, Senior Wei!” The disciples exclaimed.

“Poor, Hanguang-jun,” Zizhen whispered, his tone sad. “I can't imagine walking around with that kind of injury to my leg.”

Wei Wuxian then turned to his brother and asked, “Hey, Jiang Cheng, doesn’t it look like Lan Zhan’s limping? He’s not putting any pressure on his leg—“

“Stay out of it if you know what’s good for you!” Jiang Wanyin hissed.

The cultivators understood his concerns and hesitation, but the Lan Family appreciated Wei Wuxian's fixation on the second jade. Out of all the disciples gathered, he was the most

concerned for Lan Wangji, the first one to notice that something was wrong with him.

“But he’s still injured,” Wen Ning said quietly enough that no one could hear him.

Wei Wuxian did not bother his brother for answers. Instead, Wei WuXian slowed down and approached Lan WangJi. Walking shoulder to shoulder with him, he asked, "What happened to your leg?"

Lan Wangji stared straight at the front, responding with a flat “Nothing.”

“That’s not nothing,” Lan Xichen blurted out. “You are injured, Wangji.”

Lan Wangji could only nod and apologize to his elder brother.

“Ugh,” Jiang Wanyin groaned. “You both are idiots.”

Offended, Wei Wuxian exclaimed, “Hey!”

Wei Wuxian, “We’re so close, but you won’t even look at me? How cold.”

“Very close,” Lan Wangji whispered, earning a smile from Wei Wuxian.

“We are not close,” Lan Wangji said flatly.

“Oh come on, don’t ignore Senior Wei like that Hanguang-jun!” Jingyi complained, but his complaint was ignored.

Wei Wuxian turned around and walked backward, determined to make Lan Wangji look at him, “Don’t force yourself if it’s not fine. Is your leg hurt? When did it happen? Do you want me to carry—”

He halted as a fragrant breeze suddenly wafted around his nose. Wei Wuxian turned around and look to the side. His eyes immediately lit up. A group of female cultivators was conversing with one another, one of them was Luo Qingyang.

One of the girls laughed, “Mianmian, your perfume sachet truly is something special. After I wore it, bugs really did stop coming over. The scent is nice too. I seem to feel much more awake after I smell it.”

Jiang Yanli was a bit disappointed that she could not smell it. She was curious about the scent of her perfume sachet.

Luo Qingyang, or Mianmian, smiled as she responded, “Inside the sachet is filled with minced medicinal plants. It can be useful in quite a lot of ways. I’ve still got a few here. Do any of you want one?”

Wei Wuxian swept over like a foreboding gust of wind, “Mianmian, save me one too.”

Confused, the cultivators gaped a bit, “Whaaa??”

“You don’t even know each other yet,” Jin Zixuan said, shaking his head.

“He doesn’t even have to know the person to be familiar with them; he’s shameless anyway,” Jiang Wanyin sighed exasperatedly.

“Hey! You just mean I’m friendly, Chengcheng!” Wei Wuxian piped in.

His brother rolled his eyes, “Whatever.”

Startled, Mianmian turned around with a slight frown on her face and asked, "Who are you? Why do you call me Mianmian as well?"

Wei Wuxian grinned, "I heard them all call you Mianmian, so I thought that it was your name. What, is it not?"

Mianmian's cheeks turned red as she exclaimed, "You can't call me that?"

"Does he do this to every girl he—"

"Don't worry, Cangse-qianbei," Jiang Yanli cuts her off to reassure her. "He flirts, but he never goes beyond that."

"Oh," Cangse Sanren sighs relievedly. "That's good," she says, turning to face her son, who is now whispering something to his husband, who appears to be in a….bad mood?

Oh…

She smirked and returned her gaze to the screen.

Still smiling, Wei Wuxian said, "Tell me your name then, and I won't call you Mianmian anymore. Isn't that a fair deal?"

"Why do I have to tell you just because you asked?" she wondered, then added, "Before you ask for somebody else's name, you should tell them your name first, shouldn't you?"

"**Sure, if you want my name," He smiled, crossing his arms. "Remember, my name is 'Yuandao'."**

The cultivators were perplexed once more, “Yuandao???”

“Why not Wei Wuxian?” Lan Sizhui pondered.

Mianmian sighed, Wei Wuxian smiled sheepishly, Nie Huaisang chuckled, and Jiang Wanyin rolled his eyes. He seemed tired of his brother’s antics.

“Yuandao?” Mianmian repeated, as if she was trying to recall his name and whether she had heard it before. Based on his demeanor and appearance, the boy is clearly not your average disciple.

“Hey, wait a minute, doesn’t the air feel cold all of the sudden?” Zizhen whispered, hugging himself and perhaps shivering a bit.

“I don’t know what you’re talking about,” Jin Ling responded noncommittally.

Suddenly, Lan Wangji’s low and cold voice came from beside them as he said, “A play of words.”

‘Mianmian si Yuandao’, a line from a famous poem. Means ‘How endless is my longing for the distant road" but can be read as "Mianmian thinks of Yuandao". He's using Mianmian name and his name as Yuandao to become a play on words.

“Ah.”

Wei Wuxian flirted with her using poetry!

“So shameless!!”

“He’s such a flirt!”

Several cultivators cast teasing glances at Wei Wuxian and Mianmian. Mianmian had never felt so humiliated in her life, and to make matters worse, a pair of golden eyes glared at the rest of the cultivators.

Right, Hanguang-jun..

Meanwhile, Wei Wuxian was delighted to witness the beginning of his husband's jealousy.

“Lan Zhan, don’t be jealous,” Wei Wuxian whispered. “I'll flirt with you through poetry as well. I'm familiar with a lot of good romantic poems.”

Lan Wangji's cold air dissipated as he delightedly nodded at his husband.

Flushing, Miamian’s eyes went wide as she exclaimed, “Who yearning for you?! You really have no face!”

One of her friends laughed and said, “Wei Wuxian, you really have no face! I’ll tell you, her name is—”

“Don’t you dare tell him!” she snaps at her friend. “Let’s go!”

“I hope you did not chase her after that, Wei Wuxian,” Madam Jin said, her voice low as she glared at Wei Wuxian, who raised both of his hands as if to surrender.

“I swear I didn't!”

Madam Jin huffed, “Good then.”

Staring at the backs of those women, he walked back to Lan Wangji side as he watch the other’s expression grow colder.

“What?” he asked, perplexed. “You’re looking at me like that again. Right, where were we again? Let’s continue. How about I carry you on my back?”

Lan Wangji looked at him quietly, “Do you behave in such a frivolous way toward everyone?”

Wei Wuxian thought for a second before saying, “I think so?”

“That's not even a good response,” Jin Zixuan sighed.

“What, you think I know what Lan Zhan was thinking?” Wei Wuxian inquired, a little offended.

Jiang Yanli chuckled, while Mianmian sighed tiredly, “So oblivious.”

Lan Wangji looked at the ground and a moment later, he hissed, “How impudent!”

He didn’t even deem it worthy to give Wei Wuxian another glare. Seeing that he was forcing himself again, Wei Wuxian hurried, “Fine! You don’t have to walk this fast, I’ll just go.”

“You should’ve let Wei Wuxian help you, A-Zhan,” Qingheng-jun said, his voice laced with worry.

“A-die, Wangji was shy and still conflicted about his feelings for Wei Wuxian, which is why he's a little harsh on him,” Lan Xichen replied softly.

“Not to mention they're in the midst of indoctrination, and he's envious of Luo Qingyang,” Cangse Sanren piped in.

Then Zizhen's face changed to one of surprise as he exclaimed, “Ah!” causing the cultivators to look at him for the unexpected shouting. “Senior Wei wasn't just flirting with Maiden Luo; he approached her on purpose because he wanted the perfume sachet for Hanguang-jun!”

“Now that I think about it, it makes sense,” Lan Sizhui whispered, a hand on his chin.

Lan Wangji turned to his husband, his eyes twinkling slightly, “Is that true?”

Wei Wuxian smiled, “Yes, I did want the perfume sachet for you, though I may have been unaware of my intentions.”

Lan Wangji’s heart warmed. He wondered if it was possible to fall in love with his husband once again.

Combining three strides into two, he quickly caught up to Jiang Wanyin. Yet, Jiang Wanyin didn't give him any good looks either.

He spoke menacingly, “You're so ridiculous!”

Wei Wuxian, “It's not like you're Lan Zhan or anything, so why do you say ridiculous as he does? His face today is worse than how it used to be. What's wrong with his leg?”

Jiang Wanyin spoke in a sour voice, “You still have the time to pay attention to him? Why don't you pay attention to yourself!?”

They were all struck by the look of envy in his eyes. Wei Wuxian’s constant presence at Lan Wangji’s side made Jiang Heir annoyed. There had never been anyone else who had captured his brother's attention like Lan Wangji. He's not entirely upset that he made a friend, but Lan Wangji was the most difficult to befriend of all the people he decided to befriend; he had no idea what Lan had that Wei Wuxian liked. Soon after, his brother chases Lan Wangji, leaving him behind. For all his life, the only people he had ever considered close to him were his sister and Wei Wuxian. It even feels wrong to share his brother with Lan Wangji, but he can’t do anything about it.

Additionally, Jiang Wanyin’s request made the Lan Family quite upset a bit, but they understood the Jiang Heir's feelings. It's just that the way he expresses his emotions isn't the best way to convey them to others. Jiang Wanyin is also upset with himself as well.

“I don't know what tricks that idiot Wen Chao is planning this time, making us search for some cave entrance here in Dusk-Creek Mountain. Hopefully, it's not like last time when he made us circle up and be shields of flesh."

Nie Huaisang sighed, shaking his head.

“Don’t remind me of that,” Jin Zixuan hissed. “I'm still mad at that Wang woman for almost turning Luo Qingyang into human bait.”

“What?!” Madam Jin exclaimed, her face turning red with rage. “That fucking—”

“Madam Jin,” Jiang Yanli called out softly. “Please remain calm.”

One of the disciples beside them whispered, “Of course his face isn't so great. Last month, the Cloud Recesses was burnt down. You didn't know yet, did you?”

Hearing this, Wei Wuxian jolted, all the color in his face began to fade, "Burnt down?!"

At the reminder, everyone's heart sank once more. It had been cruel of the Wen Sect to attack Cloud Recesses while they were unprepared.

In the past few days, Jiang Wanyin had heard too many of these stories, so he wasn't as surprised as Wei Wuxian was, "By the Wen Sect's people?"

The disciple nodded, "You can say that. You can also say... that the Lan Sect itself burnt everything down. The eldest son of the Wen Sect, Wen Xu, went to Gusu. He accused the Lan Sect's leader of something and forced the Lan Sect's people to burn down their own residence! It was given pretty names like cleaning up the place so that it's reborn from the firelight. Most of the Cloud Recesses and its surrounding forest has been burnt down. Just like that, the hundreds of years old paradise had been destroyed. The leader of the Lan Sect was heavily injured. We don't even know if he's still alive. Well, well..."

The glasses of Nie Mingjue and Jiang Fengmian had cracked. While the former vented his rage loudly, the latter remained silent. Images of Wen Chao burning and attacking his home flashed through his mind.

'I'll have to relive my worst nightmare again in the next few memories,' he lamented, turning to his wife. *'San-niang…'*

Wei Wuxian, "Is Lan Zhan's leg related to this?"

Even so, Lan Wangji is Wei Wuxian's top priority. The ears of the second jade turned bright red.

The disciple responded, not too loudly, "Of course. The first place that Wen Xu ordered them to burn down was the Library Pavilion. He declared that he'll teach anyone who wasn't willing to do it a lesson. Lan Wangji refused. He was attacked by Wen Xu's people and they broke one of his legs. It hadn't even been healed yet, and he was dragged out here again. Who knows what they're trying to do?!"

The flashback of Lan Wangji limping in front of the blazing doors of the Library Pavilion, protecting it from Wen Xu's people. His body was trembling, his breath was

strained and heavy, and his guqin lay broken on the ground. His pristine white robes were torn, and his golden eyes shone with the most intensity and emotion anyone had ever seen from him. They radiated resolve and determination.

Without thinking any further, Wei Wuxian moved to go to Lan Wangji's side, only for Jiang Wanyin to stop him.

"What's wrong with you, now?! You still dare provoke him? You really are digging your own grave!"

"He's trying to help him! Why are you holding him back?!" A female cultivator expressed her dissatisfaction.

"If Hanguang-jun is not treated sooner, who knows what will happen to his leg?!" a friend of hers added, and they all shuddered. The thought of Lan Wangji losing his other leg was sickening.

Yu Ziyuan, who is still unable to speak, wants to defend her son's actions, reasoning, *'He's preventing him from causing trouble! It's only right for Jiang Cheng to stop him!'*

Wei Wuxian's playful demeanor had vanished, replaced by a solemn one, "I'm not going to provoke him. Look at his leg. He's been on the go for so many days—the state of his injury must've worsened. If he walks on like this, it's likely that he won't ever be able to use his leg again."

The severity of Lan Wangji's injury only indicated that Wen Xu broke his leg in a torturous way. Even the thought of Lan Wangji being tortured made Wei Wuxian's heart set ablaze. His eyes began to flicker back and forth from grey to red, and before tendrils of resentful energy could surround his hand, Wei Changze moved to place his hand on top of his son's.

"A-Ying, calm down," he said gently as if he were speaking to the most fragile thing that ever existed. "Lan Wangji, he will be fine. You will help him."

When his father's words reached him, he took a deep breath, recalling the time he and his husband were trapped in the cave.

“Yes,” he declared. “Of course I will.”

Lan Wangji and Wei Changze exchanged smiles.

I'm gonna carry him,” Wei Wuxian decided.

“Yes! Carry him!” A young man exclaimed.

“Carry him at the back!” his friend yelled gleefully.

“Alternatively, princess carry him!!”

Jiang Wanyin pulled him even closer, “It's not as if you're familiar with him! Don't you see how much he hates you? You're going to carry him? He probably doesn't even want you a step closer to him.”

“I do not hate Wei Ying,” Lan Wangji stated coldly.

“You’re so wrong about everything, Jiang-xiong,” Nie Huaisang chuckled.

And, of course, Jiang Wanyin was aware of everything now.

Wei Wuxian, “It's alright if he hates me—I don't hate him. I'll get him onto my back the second I get hold of him. Could he possibly choke me to death while on my back?”

Jiang Wanyin warned, “We aren't even able to care for ourselves; how do we have the time to care about the trivialities of others?”

Wei Wuxian, “First, this isn't a triviality. Second, things like this, somebody will have to care about them, sooner or later!”

Jiang Wanyin desired to protect the Jiang Clan, whereas Wei Wuxian desired to help those in need. These were both brothers' top priorities. The differences in their opinions and principles were one of the things that broke the bond between the two. Not everyone knows yet, but Jiang Wanyin mocked Wei Wuxian's hero complex, which is also one of the reasons he envies his brother: he can save anyone he wants, whereas he has to worry about everything and keep their sect safe. The issue of saving people is dependent on the situation that has been presented to him.

With that, Wei Wuxian walked past Jiang Wanyin and returned to Lan Wangji, who had already sat down on a rock, his eyes closed as if meditating.

Then he kneeled in front of him, facing away, “Lan Zhan, come on. I’ll carry you on my back.”

Many female cultivators smiled. Wei Wuxian can be annoying and a jokester, but he’s also caring and sweet. Lan Wangji is extremely fortunate to have him.

Lan Wangji made no move to stand, so Wei Wuxian nagged, “Hurry up! The injury to your right leg can’t be endured any longer. Also, we’re also so close. No need to be shy.”

“Go, Hanguang-jun!” Zizhen yelled.

“Yes, let him carry you, A-Zhan,” Madam Lan advised quietly.

Lan Wangji looked at him before huffing and turning away, “Not close.”

“So much denying!” A-Qing complained. Really, they're adults, but they're dumber than she is. It's excruciating to watch! Like, just get on his back already!

“Hey, what are you doing?” a Wen disciple demanded. “Don’t slack off!”

Lan Wangji had to force himself to stand and walk. Wei Wuxian was taken aback before another Wen disciple shoved him forward with another reprimand, “Don’t slack off. Go find it!”

“Hey!” Jingyi scowled. “Don’t shove him like that! He was just trying to help Hanguang-jun!”

On the other side of the table, Lan Wangji leaned in close to his husband's ears, “Thank you, Wei Ying.”

Wei Wuxian blushed and grinned, “No sorry’s and thank you’s, remember?”

“Hmm, Hmm, but I'm grateful to Wei Ying for attempting to help.”

Jiang Wanyin turned to his brother and sent him a look.

“All scatter and search, every inch of here,” Wang Lingjiao ordered. “The cave of that monster that Wen-gongzi wants to hunt is nearby. If his hunt-hunt is delayed, there will be consequences.”

Cangse Sanren frowned, “Why is she ordering them as if she's also a young mistress?”

“She’s soon to be Wen Chao’s wife,” Madam Jin responded. “She will have power and authority in the future, so that’s bound to happen.”

Cangse Sanren scoffed, “The audacity.”

“In this day and age, even this made of slut can ride on our backs,” Jiang Wanyin muttered with displeasure.

“Leave her alone and don't bother her,” Nie Huaisang said, peeking out from Wei Wuxian’s back. “The branding iron is dangerous. It leaves a mark on contact. If a vital part is hurt, the meridians may be damaged. In a word, you’d better shun her.”

“What are they, animals?!” Nie Mingjue exclaimed, unable to contain his rage any longer. Some cultivators wholeheartedly agreed with him. Even Baoshan Sanren was not pleased with this.

“And to think Mianmian’s face almost got branded,” Wei Wuxian muttered, receiving another dark look from Madam Jin.

“She what?”

“You’ll see later, A-Niang,” Jin Zixuan interjected.

Then, a woman's scream interrupted the scene, and Wei Wuxian immediately turned to look.

“Don’t do this, Wen-gongzi!”

“Wait, that voice—”

Luo Qingyang!

“That sick motherfuck—”

“Wen Chao!!” Madam Jin stood up, her anger rising.

“Madam Jin, please calm your—”

“Did he touch you?!” Madam Jin demanded, refusing to be restrained by her.

“No! Of course not! Wei Wuxian saved me.”

“Wei Wuxian?”

All cultivators turned to look at Wei Wuxian.

Wen Chao crept closer to the trembling woman, laughing and grinning, “Don’t do what? Not pull your hands or not kiss your little cheek?”

“Ew, so gross!”

“Go to your slut of a woman!”

The vulgar insult made Lan Qiren, Lan Xichen, and Qingheng-jun wince.

“I want to punch him,” Jin Zixuan whispered, his body trembling with rage. Even Jin Ling did not know what to do. His father is frightening!

“A-Xuan, look at me,” Jiang Yanli said gently, and the man turned. “I know you're upset for your friend, but please calm down. Wen-gongzi is not around anymore to touch her, do you understand?”

The anger in Jin Zixuan’s eyes slowly dissipated, “Yes, I know.”

Jin Ling watched his parents in astonishment. His mother really is the only one who can tame his father!

Meanwhile…

“Can you bring him back so I can punch him myself?” Madam Jin requested the immortal, who gave her a cold look. She realizes she's being disrespectful by ordering her as if she weren't a superior, but all she wanted was to satisfy her rage.

However, Baoshan Sanren unexpectedly considered her words, “I can, but that would mean he will stay since I cannot bring him back. Do all of you want that?”

“Hell no!”

“No way!”

“Let him stay dead!”

Protests rang out in the temple, but with a snap of her fingers, all cultivators clamped their mouths shut.

“I will not bring him back,” Baoshan Sanren declared. “However, Madam Jin's rage will be quenched later. Please bear a few more memories.”

Madam Jin huffed and sat back down.

Right after Wen Chao leaned in to kiss her, a leaf blocked his mouth, preventing him from getting closer to the woman.

“Hold right there,” Wei Wuxian said with a sly grin. “What’s the fun of taking by force, Wen-gongzi?”

“You—”

“No rush,” Wei Wuxian leaned close to whisper, “I have something better~” and made a beckoning gesture. “Exquisite erotic art~”

Mianmian sighed once again, and Madam Jin raised a brow.

“Is that supposed to help?” Xiao Xingchen asked, quite unsure.

“He stopped Wen Chao from kissing her, so I guess so,” Song Lan responded, also a bit unsure.

“He’s got an Erotic art!” Jingyi exclaimed, half shouting, half whispering. “How did he sneak that in?!”

“I-I’m sure that’s not an Erotic art,” Wen Ning said timidly.

Mianmian looked at the two men in front of her, puzzled.

Wen Chao made grabby hands as if he wanted it, but Wang Lingjiao already came running over.

“Wen-gongzi, found it! We found the cave!” she informed.

“Where? Take me there now!” Wen Chao demanded and began to walk away, but Wang Lingjiao already caught sight of Mianmian on the ground and her smile vanished. As the couple made their way to the said cave, Wang Lingjiao clutched Wen Chao's arm even tighter in a possessive manner.

“It took me a lot of effort to find it~” she sang.

“You did nothing other than threaten the disciples with an Iron brand,” Nie Huaisang blurted out.

Her friend then approached her and inquired, “Mianmian, are you alright?”

“I-I’m fine..”

Nie Huaisang then slides in, asking, “Wei-Xiong, where did you get the erotic art?”

Wei Wuxian laughed, reaching into his robes and pulling out the *‘Wen Clan Essence Collection’* booklet.

Realizing the trick that he did, the cultivators gaped, “Ohhh..”

Tricking people appears to be easy for Wei Wuxian, and he's so naturally good at it that it's impressive. Now the negative side of this is that he can use this skill to take advantage of someone. People will have to be more cautious of him from now on; same goes for a certain someone.

“That was clever, Wei-gongzi,” Lan Xichen praised.

Not responding to his friend's question, Wei Wuxian reached down to pick up the perfume sachet he wanted from Mianmian earlier and spun it around his index finger.

"This sachet smells nice," he complimented. "Now can I have one, Mianmian?"

"He really wants the perfume sachet."

"It's for Hanguang-jun, remember?"

Mianmian snatched the sachet from Wei Wuxian's grasp, "Don't ever call me that!"

"Are you not going to tell me? Then I'll find other people and ask for your name. There must be someone out there who's willing to tell me—"

Before he could finish his sentence, a perfume sachet flew over and landed right in the middle of his chest.

"Fine! Just take it!" She yelled, storming away, her cheeks flushed.

"What are you doing?" A Wen disciple shouted. "Hurry up!"

Wei Wuxian grumbled but walked towards the cave nonetheless.

The entrance led to deep underground. The cold air plunged into everyone's faces, sending chills down their back. Nothing was heard of the pebble that had been tossed inside. It was as though it had sunk into the sea.

“That’s some creepy cave,” Zizhen shuddered. “I wouldn't even dare to go in there.”

“And knowing the legendary beast is there? Nope,” a Jin disciple said, popping the *‘p’*.

“This is tantamount to sending their disciples to an early and torturous death.”

The disciples, although reluctant, went down to the cave.

“Careful, hold on tight.”

“Slow down.”

“It’s so dark in here.”

“Where should we go?”

“Be careful,” Jiang Yanli muttered, her voice tinged with worry. She did not like the darkness at all. She couldn't see her brothers or husband. The tension of the search was building as well.

“Listen! Sounds like water!”

“Come on, let’s check it out.”

They continued walking in total darkness to the empty cave, barely able to make out any rock formations or so. Later, they lit their torches, illuminating the narrow path. When they reached a pool of water, they could make out an island in the middle of the pool.

A gasp, “T-That’s not an island..”

“What?”

“If look at it carefully, you would know that it’s a large shell of a…” the young man’s voice trailed off, and the cultivators can guess what he's about to say next..

Wei Wuxian made an impressed sound.

“Don't just stand there; go inside right now!” Wen Chao ordered.

Jiang Fengmian sighed. If Wen Chao continues to speak loudly, the beast will awaken at any moment, which is to say, it did.

Jin Zixuan couldn’t hold it any longer, he spoke coldly, “You brought us here, saying we’ll be hunting a beast. Then, if I may ask, what sort of a beast is it? Informing us beforehand would allow us to cooperate with more efficiency so that we wouldn’t be as confused as last time.”

Nie Mingjue and Lan Qiren nodded in approval, while Madam Jin's heart swelled with pride; it was only natural that he was concerned about his own safety rather than cowering under Wen Chao's orders.

Wen Chao huffed, “I’ll say this for the last time. I give the order, you carry it out. You are just my errand boys. Don’t try to talk back. Hurry up!”

“How dare you make them your errand boys?!” Yu Ziyuan hissed, only to realize that the silencing spell had been lifted, and then she proceeds to sneer, “How about you do the hunting by yourself then?!”

“He's not informing them, so they won't survive,” Wei Changze stated confidently, and they were worried that he might be right.

“What on earth is this monster?’ Nie Huaisang asked behind Wei Wuxian. “We’ve been here for two hours, but it still doesn’t show up.”

“Wait, you’ve been inside for two hours already?” Song Lan gaped. Earlier, they just saw them climb down the cave, and now they’re waiting there for two hours now?

“It’s not that it’s not showing up, it’s there sleeping,” Wen Qing explained, beginning to worry about Wei Wuxian’s safety.

“Hopefully the prey he wants to hunt this time won’t be anything too difficult,” Jiang Wanyin whispered. “I don’t know if there are any other exits here.”

Everyone sighed, knowing what was about to happen.

“Why is it taking us a long time to find it?!” Wen Chao impatiently demanded.

“If you’re too impatient, why don’t you find it yourself since you’re too proud to inform them what you’re looking for,” Nie Mingjue suggested irritably.

Everyone wholeheartedly agreed with him.

Irritated, Wen Chao shouted, “Hey, go suspend someone and bleed them to lure the monster out! Don’t waste my time!”

“You fucking—”

“A human bait?!”

“How dare you, Wen Chao!”

“This is unforgivable!”

If Wen Chao targets an heir from a clan, all clans, minor and major sects will unite to go against Wen Clan. Disciples were here for their *‘special education’*, and all they did was hunt in Wen Chao's favor and obey him as if they were hostages (which, in a way, they are), but now that there will be a human bait, they will all die.

Wang Lingjiao, smirking, may have already someone in mind…

“Don’t you fucking dare..” Madam Jin hissed angrily.

“What about her?” she suggested, pointing at Mianmian.

Jiang Yanli and Madam Lan paled. They knew why Wang Lingjiao suggested her. It's not even Mianmian's fault that Wen Chao was attracted to her, and yet she suggests that she be the human bait solely because she’s jealous of her.

Mianmian sighed again, her hands trembling as she stared at the memories. The fear she felt at the time returned full force, and she didn't stop trembling until Madam Jin held her hand.

“Her?... Umm,” Wen Chao hesitates.

And that might be a good thing that he did not want her to be the human bait after all, because of his attraction to her.

“I say, pick another.”

Wang Lingjiao draped herself over Wen Chao, whining, “Why? I really want her though.”

“You shameless slut,” Yu Ziyuan grits her teeth in anger and disgust. Even Jiang Fengmian did not stop her from venting her displeasure.

“What, are you attracted to her?”

Wen Chao forced a laugh, “Nonsense. Why would I be attracted?” He cleared his throat and turned to his men, ordering, “Someone tie her up!”

“No!!” Jiang Yanli shouted and stood up as if she wanted to protect her, but Jin Zixuan and Jin Ling already held her back.

“A-Niang, stop!”

“A-Li, we can’t do anything. We cannot interfere.”

Jiang Yanli turned to Mianmian, who gave her an appreciative smile before she sighed and sat back down. Funny how she wants to protect another woman despite her low cultivation. Even if she does manage to intervene, she won't be able to do much. Worst case scenario, she might’ve been a human bait along with her.

Mianmian, frightened and scared, turned and ran away, fearing for her life.

Wen Chao warned, “Whoever stands up for her will never get out of here alive.”

“Now he’s threatening all of their lives!” Madam Lan shrieked, shaking with fear. Her son..Her son is still injured!

Zizhen and Lan Sizhui could feel the rapid beating of their hearts in anxiousness. As far as they know, Hanguang-jun and Senior Wei, as well as Sect Leader Jiang and Jin-gongzi, will be safe. However, what's more concerning is that they just happened to see Su She among the Lan disciples, and no one seemed to notice his presence yet!

One of the Lan disciples who Mianmian had hidden behind then looked down on the ground and slowly moved out of the way.

“Su She!” Lan Qiren stood up, and the cultivators who recognized him from the earlier memories began to whisper.

“Outrageous!”

“How unrighteous!”

“What a coward,” Wei Wuxian remarked coldly, and Lan Wangji reciprocated the feeling.

“He should’ve picked him instead of her,” Jiang Wanyin hissed. “Then everyone will be happy,”

All of the Lan disciples eventually distanced themselves from her, fearing for their lives as well.

Lan Qiren and the rest of the Lans were ashamed, angry, upset, and disappointed that their disciples valued their own lives more than those in desperate need. Heavens, even Lan Jingyi, the most un-Lan Lan of them all, is more righteous and brave than any other disciple there, and Lan Qiren would hate to admit he’s fond of him.

Wei Wuxian attempted to move forward to step in, but Jiang Wanyin held him back.

Mianmian looked around and made one more attempt to run and hide behind the two disciples, who did not move away from her.

“Hanguang-jun!” The cultivators cheered.

“Lan Zhan!” Wei Wuxian squealed like a maiden. “So handsome!”

“Father!” Jin Ling exclaimed, his eyes brightening as he saw his father protecting his friend.

“Well done, A-Xuan,” Jiang Yanli and Madam Jin said, making the man smile and nod.

Lan Wangji and Jin Zixuan stood tall and proud.

“Out of the way,” A Wen disciple ordered.

Jin Zixuan only scoffed in response, while Lan Wangji remained indifferent and perfectly still.

Qingheng-jun, Lan Xichen, Madam Lan, and Lan Qiren felt a rush of pride for the second jade. Despite the risk of endangering himself further to protect Luo Qingyang, he stood firm in his morals and principles.

“Well done, Wangji,” Qingheng-jun said with a smile, and Lan Wangji felt his heart warm once more.

“Thank you, A-Die.”

Seeing that the situation wasn't good, Wen Chao warned, "Why are you standing there?" You can't understand human speech? Or do you want to save the damsel in distress?"

Jin Zixuan lifted his brows, "Is that enough? It wasn't enough for people to be flesh shields for you, and now you want live humans to bleed for you to use as bait?!"

Jin Ling is so proud of his father for being so brave that he couldn't help but smile and look up at his father, who seemed too absorbed in the memory.

'I want to be as brave as A-Die in the future,' he thought giddily.

'Huh,'* Wei Wuxian thought in surprise. *'This Jin Zixuan guy unexpectedly has guts.'

Jin Zixuan was so taken aback by Wei Wuxian's unexpected compliment that he had to blink several times before turning to face him.

Wei Wuxian rolled his eyes, "What? I compliment people when I believe they are deserving."

"Ah huh," Jin Zixuan trailed off. "Thank you?"

Wen Chao stepped down from the rock and walk forward toward Lan Wangji and Jin Zixuan, enraged as he shouts, "You people want to rebel? Let me warn you, I've been tolerating you for a very long time. Right now, hang the brat up with your own hands! Or else none of the people from your sects can expect to return!"

Jin Zixuan sneered and stood firm. Lan Wangji also appeared to have heard nothing; he was motionless, as if meditating. Wen Chao's threatening words proved effective as the disciples began to hesitate. Lan Wangji and Jin Zixuan were well aware that no one would attempt to help them. At worst, all of them might want to go against them.

Then a woman screamed, forcing them to turn around to see Su She attempting to drag Mianmian out of Lan Wangji and Jin Zixuan's back.

“Let me go! Leave me alone!” Mianmian shouted.

Madam Jin glared at Lan Qiren, and the latter knew and understood what she was feeling all too well. He's ashamed, so ashamed to have let that man be a Lan disciple. He was not worthy of being a Lan or a disciple of any sect, knowing how nasty and deceptive he is.

He continued to drag her away, only to blink up in shock when sparks of blue light struck him and slammed him into the cave wall.

Lan Wangji had attacked him..

Wei Wuxian blushed, *‘Oh, that was so hot.’*

No one made the comment that Lan Wangji just attacked a fellow Lan disciple, but given that it was Su She, it had to be done.

“I wish Hanguang-jun had done more damage to him,” Jingyi whispered.

“He’ll die anyways,” Zizhen stated unequivocally.

Su She wanted to stand up but shrank back down under Lan Wangji’s cold glare. Although he didn’t say anything, the way he looked at him was more than imposing. What such a look meant was clear to everyone—it truly is a shame that the Gusu Lan Sect has taught a disciple like you.

Jiang Wanyin clenched his fists. In such a situation, it was almost impossible to care for oneself only and hope that no blood would be lost.

The cultivators glared at the screen, specifically at the Wens. Even Wen Qing and Wen Ning couldn't fault them for doing so, they're doing the same thing anyway.

Wen Chao, enraged, shouted, “How dare you! Kill them!”

The Wen disciples ran towards the pair, attacking them with their all. Despite being the only ones with swords, the heirs remained unscathed. With only their spiritual power and combat skills to defend themselves, the Wen disciples could not land a hit on them or beat them.

The crowd cheers.

“Go, Hanguang-jun!”

“Go Jin Zixuan!”

“Beat them up!”

“Don’t let them stand a chance!”

“Oh, how I wish I was there to beat them up as well!”

The elders of the larger sects prayed for the safety of their heirs. Nie Mingjue, on the other hand, became agitated. He hadn't seen Huaisang since the scene in which he hid behind Wei Wuxian. Where could his brother be hiding now?

Eventually, the Jin disciples decided to step in and joined the fight, attacking and beating the Wen disciples with their bare hands. Unlike most disciples, the Jin disciples were also Jin Zixuan's friends (or acquaintances for Jin Zixuan), and they were loyal to him; they would not let their heir fight alone. Lan Wangji, on the other hand, was an heir, not a future sect leader. Disciples listen to his orders (he rarely orders anyone unless it is absolutely necessary), but they only rely on him for assistance.

Lan Xichen sighed, unable to conceal his displeasure.

The cultivators continued to cheer and curse Wen Chao. But among the cheering crowd were a solemn-looking Jiang Fengmian and Cangse Sanren. Now that the fight has commenced and shouts are echoing through the walls, disturbing whatever is resting there, it's only a matter of time before the beast appears, and the disciples will undoubtedly suffer.

While the fight is happening, Wen Zhuliu stood behind Wen Chao with his hands folded behind him. He never attacked, as if he didn't think he needed to, and he's right; he didn't have to. Given that the two boys were at a loss for both weapons and sheer numbers. Even more, after the past days of being constantly on the move, they were in a quite a bad state. Not to mention that Lan Wangji, their strongest fighter, had been injured, they definitely wouldn't be able to last long.

Wen Chao watched the scene unfold before him with wide eyes, "Challenging me? Who do you think you are?!" he shouted, unsheathing his sword. "Kill! Kill them all!"

"Exactly! Bullies who abuse the power of their clans to do evil should be killed."

Realizing that it was Wei Wuxian who spoke, Yu Ziyuan sneered, "What are you trying to do?"

"What did you say?" Wen Chao demanded.

"I said bullies who abuse the power of their clans to do evil should be killed," Wei Wuxian said again, his smile full of hidden intentions. "Not only killed but also beheaded and reviled to warn future generations. Am I clear?"

An unknown cultivator snorted, “Did he just use a Wen Sect quote on Wen Chao?”

Realizing this, another cultivator openly laughed, “Oh my god, he did!”

“You memorized that quote from the booklet, didn’t you?” Jin Ling asked, his mouth agape.

“Of course, A-Ling,” Wei Wuxian smirked. “Well, actually that was the quote that piqued my interest the most.”

Wei Wuxian smiled in amusement, “Oh, this one is not that bad.”

Jin Ling looked at him for a moment before returning to the screen. So that was what he meant earlier.

Hearing this, Wen Zhuliu seemed to ponder this as he glanced at Wei Wuxian.

There was a long pause as Wen Chao considered his words.

“Did he seriously not know his own Sect’s rules or something?” An unknown cultivator asked in bewilderment.

His friend then shrugged, “He probably did not memorize it, thinking he doesn’t need to. What arrogance.”

Moments passed, Wen Chao tensed and turned to Wei Wuxian as he erupted, “How dare you say such absurd, outrageous, and pretentious words?!”

Wen Zhuliu sighed in disappointment.

Wei Wuxian first lifted the corners of his mouth with a 'pfft', then immediately burst into unbridled laughter. Under everyone's stunned gaze, he laughed so hard that he was out of breath, clutching Jiang Wanyin's shoulder as she spoke, "Absurd? Outrageous? I'd say you're the one who's all of those! Wen Chao, do you know who said those words? I'm sure you don't, do you? Let me tell you, this was said by the most, most, most famous cultivator from your sect, the one who founded the entire thing, Wen Mao." Wei Wuxian pulled out the booklet of '*Quintessence of the Wens'*.

Snorts and gasps erupted throughout the temple, while Cangse Sanren burst out laughing from her seat.

"Oh, A-Ying, that was so good! You really are my son!"

They were once again blown away. Wei Wuxian had previously expressed disinterest in reading the booklet, but he eventually memorized it. He even memorized Wen Mao's quote to probably tease or use on someone in the future, and unbelievably, he used it on Wen Chao!

"Ah, so memorizing quotes and proverbs is beneficial now," a Nie disciple muttered, taking mental notes.

"You dare say one of your ancestor's remarks is absurd and outrageous?" he asked, throwing the booklet at Wen Chao's feet. "Well said, very well said!"

Wen Chao's complexion switched between red and white, "Wei Wuxian, you—"

Wei Wuxian then added, "Right, what was the accusation leveled against those who insulted famous cultivators of the Wen Sect again? I remember that it was execution, right? Yes, very well, you can die now."

The disciples giggled because damn, that was funny, and this man really needs to die for making Hanguang-jun suffer.

Wen Chao couldn't hold himself back any longer, unsheathing his sword and lunging at Wei Wuxian. With that, he lunged out of Wen Zhuliu's range of protection.

Wen Zhuliu had not anticipated Wen Chao leaving on his own accord. Facing the sudden difficulty, he somehow couldn't react in time. He chased after Wen Chao, but it took him some time to get close. Wei Wuxian swiftly avoided Wen Chao's sword, and in a split second, he snatched it and reversed the situation, subduing Wen Chao with just one move.

One hand gripping Wen Chao, he leaped a few times and landed on one of the islets above the pool, keeping his distance from Wen Zhuliu. With his other hand, he pressed the sword onto Wen Chao's neck, warning, "Nobody move. If you're not careful, I might just decide to let some blood out of your Young Master Wen!"

"Nice job, Wei Wuxian!"

"How the hell did he move so fast and planned all of that ahead of time?"

"Well, he's Wei Wuxian."

Hearing the cultivators praise him, Wei Wuxian became flustered, while Lan Wangji, Jiang Yanli, Wen Qing, and the Wei Family felt their hearts swell with pride. Nobody would be able to turn that situation around better than him. His awareness and analysis of everything are beyond them.

Wen Chao screeched, "Stop moving! Stop moving!"

"Gongzi!"

Wen Qing smirked internally, seeing how the man struggled, and Wen Ning was certain he moved away from his sister because of that terrifying look she was currently wearing.

Wei Wuxian shouted, “Core melting Hand, you're not moving either! You know how the temper of the Wen Sect's leader is. Your master is in my hand. If he loses just one drop of blood, then not one of the people here should hope to live on, including you!”

As expected, Wen Zhuliu put his arms down.

“What a loyal dog,” Nie Mingjue hissed, but it was probably for the best that he's following Wei Wuxian's orders to buy some time to devise another escape plan. However, he's most concerned that any mistake Wei Wuxian will make will open an opportunity for Wen Zhuliu to attack, then it’s all over. With no weapons and a strong guard dog with them, they’ll be human live bait sooner or later.

Just imagining his brother all tied up, bloodied and crying, screaming for help, makes Nie Mingjue want to slay those who hurt him.

“W-Wei Wuxian, I’m telling you now, if you hurt me, all of you will die right here, so drop your swords right no—”

A rumble shook the ground, and it intensified the moment a shadow emerged from the water behind Wei Wuxian. Wei Wuxian then finally realized that what he’s stepping into right now wasn't an island, but a large creature that had been sleeping below the depths of the pool. He was standing on the shell behind the back of the beast!

The cultivators’ eyes widened in terror.

“Wei Wuxian,” Jiang Wanyin shouted. “Watch out!”

Wei Wuxian's eyes widened, and behind him, a crimson eye, larger than his head, blinked open.

"Wei Wuxian!!"

"Wei Ying!!"

The approach of the foreign beast brought upon them formless tension. As it stared at the terrified cultivators, the beast let out a terrifying, low growl.

It was the Xuanwu of Slaughter.

"W-W-Wait! You have to fight that?!" Jin Ling gaped, turning to face his father with wide eyes, and the disciples trembled in fear; that creature's eyes were bigger than their bell tower.

"T-That's too big of a creature to fight! Even disciples their age can't fight it!" Madam Lan stands up, both angry and worried. "They don't have swords to defend themselves! How do they escape?!"

"They will escape," Jiang Fengmian said firmly, assuring her. "They will survive."

With such a firm response of assurance, Madam Lan sat back down, and Qingheng-jun held her hand to comfort her.

The gigantic tortoise moved its head closer to the cultivators. Aside from a few—Lan Wangji, Jin Zixuan, Jiang Wanyin, and Wen Zhuliu—everyone else kept on staggering backward. Just as everyone thought the underwater creature would flip out any moment, it halted.

Wei Wuxian, who had most likely jumped on its back and was the reason the dormant beast had awakened, did not dare to make a hasty move. He remained standing and

waited.

Song Lan commended Wei Wuxian for not acting hastily. For a split second, he thought the creature would attack him because he was the reason it had awoken, but from the looks of it, that does not appear to be the case.

Composedly, Wei Wuxian met the creature's crimson eyes. Its pupil was just a slit, its thickness shifting, as though its eyes were switching in and out of focus, not completely able to tell what exactly was on its back.

'It seems like this beast had the eyesight of a snake as well—not too good.'* Wei Wuxian observed. *'As long as we stay still, maybe it wouldn't be able to notice.

"Good observation," Wei Changze praised, earning a large smile from his son.

Suddenly, Wen Chao screamed, "Wen Zhuliu, help me!"

Jiang Cheng cursed through clenched teeth, "That idiot!"

The cultivators mirrored his reaction.

"Can someone kill him already?!"

Wei Wuxian shoved Wen Chao out of the way and the tortoise attacked.

It attacked from where Wen Chao and Wei Wuxian had been standing earlier, creating a massive cloud of dust in the air. Wen Chao landed face-first on the ground, but he quickly sat up, trembling as he looked back at the giant creature, ignoring the blood running down his nose.

Earlier he was confident he can slay this creature with the help of his meat shields, but the size and power this creature possesses are beyond him, beyond anyone. Now he realized the severity of the situation.

They will die if they don't escape right now.

"You are not escaping along with them!" Yu Ziyuan hissed, but knowing what was going to happen, her threat was useless!

The tortoise stood up fully, its head almost reaching the top of the cave, and let out an unearthly roar that shook the cave's walls.

Because of the loud roar, the cultivators covered their ears. This roar alone could make someone go deaf. While they were busy covering their ears, they observed the creature. The tortoise was enormous; it's difficult to imagine how such a large creature could fit in such a small space.

"W-What….a large tortoise!" Nie Huaisang shrieked, hiding behind the cave walls.

The Wen disciples positioned themselves, aimed their arrows at the creature, and fired, but due to the tortoise's rock-like scales, the arrows only bounced back.

The tortoise opened its gigantic jaws.

"What?" Xiao Xingchen gasped out. Only the Wens had weapons (swords, bows, and arrows), but if the creature's skin is as tough to penetrate as rock, then they're defenseless. He paled even more.

Jiang Yanli's breathing was becoming difficult. She is concerned for her brothers' safety. She may know what will happen next, but she's still anxious. Jin Zixuan noticed her trembling and held her close while whispering soothing words along with Jin Ling.

Wei Wuxian hid behind the cave walls with Wen Chao's sword in his hand. He looked at the beast analytically, as if he was considering other ways to temporarily subdue it. However, just as he was about to move out to where he was hiding, a fearful cry caught his attention.

Wei Wuxian turned around to see Wang Lingjiao giving orders to three servants. Two of them brutally restrained Mianmian.

"Hold her down," she ordered.

"Mianmian!!"

"That slut! She still wasn't over what happened earlier!"

Wang Lingjiao laughed as the searing-hot iron seal of Wen Sect's branding iron was slowly lowered towards her face.

The current Mianmian felt her heart drop. Although she was saved, the person who saved her was branded in return. She turned in Wei Wuxian's direction as the man watched the memory with a solemn expression. No words can express how grateful she is to him for saving her.

Mianmian flinched, closing her eyes as she screamed once more for help.

"Someone save her!!"

In a split second, the three Wen Disciples were cut down by a flying sword, but Wang Lingjiao paid no attention to them as she continued to lower the branding iron on Mianmian.

Wei Wuxian, even though he was some distance away, ran in between them. When the iron made contact with his chest, he let out an agonized scream that shook the walls.

“Wei Wuxian!!”

“Wei Ying!!”

“Senior Wei!!”

The cultivators screamed simultaneously in horror.

A glitch occurred alongside Wei Wuxian's agonized scream, and a man in white robes pressed the searing-hot iron into his chest, gasping in pain.

“W-What?” The cultivators wondered in confusion.

“W-Who was that?” Madam Lan shakily asked, while Qingheng-jun paled. Madam had a feeling that she knew that person, but she was terrified that her suspicions were correct. Lan Xichen and Lan Qiren made no attempt to answer her.

Wei Wuxian's heart broke and tears welled up in the corners of his eyes. That was Lan Zhan. That was his husband branding himself in order to have a memory of him. A whimper escaped his lips, but only Lan Zhan was able to hear it.

“L-Lan Zhan..”

“Wei Ying,” he comforted softly. “I am alright.”

And the memory comes to an end..

While Wei Wuxian and Lan Wangji were in their own little world, Cangse Sanren exclaimed, “That fucking bitch!!” as she stood up, her body shaking in rage. She had just witnessed her son being branded with a Wen Sect seal! On her side, she can also feel her husband’s anger, but unlike her, his anger was expressed in silence, and Wei Changze being angry in silence was a completely different Wei Changze.

The act Wei Wuxian made stunned them. Even though they shared Wei Wuxian's sentiments, they were unwilling to be branded by a seal, let alone a Wen Sect seal. Being branded by it like you were one of the Wen Sect's possessions, but Wei Wuxian didn't think of that and risked himself to protect Luo Qingyang. He had saved a Su She before; he even saved a rabbit, yet this was entirely different. Now, the consequences of his actions left a scar on his chest that will remain for the rest of his life (well, he no longer has that scar since he's in a new body).

“What options do they have to escape?” Wen Ning inquired. He knew that the disciples were trapped inside the cave, but he didn't hear how they escaped.

Wen Qing scoffed, “Wei Wuxian probably risked his life again,” The man really needs to control his hero complex or it will lead to bigger problems, which it did before.

“Now that the memory has ended, the next will be up in a few minutes,” Baoshan Sanren said solemnly as he approached the table. “Do you still want to eat?” she inquired, “or should we move to the main hall?”

Lan Xichen stands up and says, “I think we should go back to the Main Hall. We've had our fill.”

The remaining cultivators rise as well. Baoshan Sanren nodded as they returned to the main hall. While doing so, cultivators began to talk about what happened.

“I wonder how Hanguang-jun and Wei Wuxian defeated that creature,” a female cultivator whispered.

“"I heard Hanguang-jun defeated that tortoise using the chord assassination technique.”

“But isn't that some kind of dangerous technique? One wrong move and you’ll be decapitated.”

“But, like, that's a cool technique though. A chord sharper than knives. If they target a weak spot on the tortoise, killing it should be easy.”

“Did you even see the scales of that thing? They're as hard as a rock. Can a chord actually harm the scales, moreover the shell”

“We’ll never know. However, as far as I know, chord assassination can cut through flesh and bone as if cutting through mud. Lan Yi originally created Chord Assassination to kill.”

The cultivators arrived at the Main Hall, and the immortal wasted no time approaching Wei Wuxian.

“Wei Wuxian, do you happen to invent an imitation talisman?” she inquired.

“Yeah,” Wei Wuxian responded, suddenly wary of her because she looks like she’s planning something dangerous. “I rarely use it, though.”

Then she smiled, a relieved smile that perplexed the majority of the cultivators. “Good, can I request for you to make it soon?”

Cangse Sanren was bothered. Her Grandmaster has the ability to create talismans, but she chooses not to do so because she is more focused on enhancing her spiritual energy and creating techniques, which would be considered forbidden because most of the techniques she create expend far too much spiritual energy and could endanger an individual if they attempted to perform them.

Wei Wuxian glanced at his mother as if he were seeking her permission. She nodded, so Wei Wuxian nodded at the immortal which earned him a sincere thanks.

“What are your plans, if you don't mind my asking?” Wei Wuxian wondered.

Her smile sent shivers down his spine as she looked at Wen Qing, “You’ll know soon.”

Chapter End Notes

By the way, I had planned to publish this chapter on the same day as Wei Ying's birthday, but I was not done yet, so I took my time, and now here it is! Hopefully, the next semester break (this December), I will be able to publish the next chapter as soon as possible. And I'm hoping I can still function normally after this because motherfuck college is exhausting as hell. Thank you for your understanding! See you in the following chapter!

P.S: That Huang Xiujing name, I made that up, so I hope you all are alright with it. And also I added a few scenes that were not in the novel, donghua, and the live action, so I also hope it was alright :)

The Xuanwu of Slaughter

Chapter Notes

> Hello, I am back! Sorry for making you all wait for so long! Because the power in my hometown is out, I had to travel to another place to charge my laptop and upload this chapter.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“Grandmaster,” Cangse Sanren approached her to speak with her privately. “This disciple would like to know why you want to use my son's imitation talisman,” she wondered, bowing her head. Her Grandmaster's earlier look at her son made her uneasy. It seemed as if she'd do the impossible as she always does, but unlike previous occasions, this time it simply made all her hair stand up in a way it never had before.

“Like I said, you will know soon, Cangse Sanren,” Baoshan Sanren responded solemnly. “Explaining its purpose at this point would only add confusion.”

Cangse Sanren did not pry any more. Her grandmaster always knows what she's up to, so she should have more faith in her.

“Did she tell you?” Wei Changze inquired of his wife, who only sighed.

“No, she said it'd be best to explain the talisman’s purpose later to avoid confusion.”

Wei Changze asked, frowning slightly, “What should we be confused about?”

“That is precisely my question.”

“Well, we don't have much choice but to wait.”

“Talk among yourselves for a moment while the memory is still processing,” Baoshan Sanren said as she turned her back and vanished in front of them like a cloud of dust.

“W-Where did she go?” A-Qing exclaimed, surprised.

“P-Potentially within the temple’s vicinity,” Sizhui stuttered, also in disbelief. In order for a cultivator to teleport to their desired location in a fraction of a second, a teleportation talisman must be used. It's beyond their wildest dreams for an immortal to vanish in front of them without a teleportation talisman.

“Just how did she do that?!” exclaimed Jin Ling, turning to face his father and pointing to where the immortal had previously stood.

Instead, Jiang Fengmian replied, “She’s an immortal. Anything impossible would be easy for her.”

“Good point,” Nie Mingjue concurred.

Wei Wuxian sighed and turned to face his ducklings. “Now, who wants to give me an unwritten pap—”

“Me!!”

“No, me, Senior Wei!!”

“Take mine, Senior Wei!!”

“Get away from me, he’ll take mine!!”

“No, he won’t! He will take mine!!”

Jiang Yanli and Mianmian chuckled in amusement, while Jin Zixuan and Jiang Wanyin released an exasperated sigh. How much do these kids adore Wei Wuxian that they are squabbling over whose talisman he should take?

While the disciples are at it, Wei Wuxian looks at his husband, whose eyes are warm as he watches the bickering children. He nudged his arm and smiled.

“Whose talisman should I take, my dear husband?”

“Wei Ying can take them all.”

Right. Why accept one when he can have all of them? “Alright then, I’ll take all of your talismans.”

“Yes! Thank you, Senior Wei!!” The disciples chorused.

Lan Qiren's brows twitched, and he closed his eyes, a headache brewing just from listening to the kids’ voices.

“You can silence them,” Qingheng-jun said, interrupting his inner turmoil.

“There’s no need,” Lan Qiren sighed. “The spell lasts only for ten minutes, and they’ll be noisy again.”

While the cultivators are occupied, Wen Qing whispers, ‘I’ll be back,’ to her brother who nods in response and quietly slips away from the crowd, entering an unknown dark room.

“I’m glad you managed to slip away without anyone following you, Wen-guniang,” Baoshan Sanren said as she turned around, her cerulean eyes turning gold. Wen Qing couldn't help but flinch as he felt the immense power the immortal was releasing within this closed space. It was as if she were confronting Wen Ruohan for the third time, only this time she was three times stronger and more powerful.

“May I inquire, immortal, why you want me to accompany you?” Wen Qing wondered. Despite the fact that Baoshan Sanren had already explained everything, she did not get the point of her going with the immortal.

“It would be great if you could come with me,” she said, holding a talisman. “I'm curious about your thoughts on the questions I'll ask you later.”

Wen Qing's eyes widened when she saw what she was holding, *‘The time-travel talisman?!’*

“W-What are you planning on doing?!” She asked sharply.

“As I previously stated,” she smiled. “You will know soon.”

The talisman hovered in front of the immortal before it shines brightly that Wen Qing had to cover her eyes. When the light dimmed, a portal appeared.

Baoshan Sanren turned around and extended her hand, “Let’s go, Wen-guniang.”

She reluctantly accepted her hand as both of them walk towards the portal. When she opened her eyes, they were at a top of a cliff. To be precise, they were at the Nightless City!

Back in the temple, the cultivators simply waited for the immortal to come back. She seemed to have gone somewhere and hasn’t come back. Fifteen minutes had already passed.

Just as the cultivators were about to complain, Baoshan Sanren appeared out of nowhere, while Wen Qing quietly joined the crowd, her face gaining a pale complexion. It was as if she had witnessed something even more terrifying than death. Sizhui was becoming concerned, so he approached his aunt and attempted to speak with her; however, she refused to respond, so he turned to his uncle, who only shook his head, clearly stating not to ask any further questions, so he returned to his seat, his concern not dissipating.

“A-jie,” Wen Ning whispered, and Wen Qing simply closed her eyes and sighed, knowing what her brother was about to ask.

“The immortal is insane,” she responded with conviction.

He suspects she is, but that is what makes her incredible. The proposal she shared with them was stupendous enough to leave both of them speechless.

“But it might be good though,” he said, turning his gaze to his master, who is gesturing enthusiastically with his and Lan Wangji's parents as if telling them about all the incredible adventures he and Lan Wangji had experienced before. “For what seemed possible may be possible.”

Wen Qing crossed her arms, “We’ll see.”

“Settle down everyone, the memory is starting.”

Wei Wuxian’s agonized scream shook the walls. However, he reacted immediately, kicking Wang Lingjiao, sending her flying several meters away before dropping to his knees, the iron brand of the Wen Clan burning his robes and searing onto his skin, leaving a scar for eternity.

“Wei Ying,” Cangse Sanren reached out her hand as if she wanted to approach her son and take away all of his pain, but Wei Changze held her back and shook his head. His son's actual body carried all of the pain and burden of the past. Although this was a heroic act, he is upset that his son recklessly jumped in between people to save others while injuring himself. He hoped that his new body did not bear the same burden and pain as his son's.

Meanwhile, Nie Mingjue and Qingheng-jun despised the seal on Wei Wuxian's chest. The seal really looked as if he were being owned by the Wens like some kind of animal or a valuable object. If their relatives were also branded with the same seal, they were for sure be furious about it as well.

“That stupid bitch really needs to be killed,” A-Qing grumbled. “How dare she hurt him?”

“A-Qing,” Xiao Xingchen sent her a stern gaze. “Watch your mouth.”

“Sorry, Daozhang.”

“Wei Wuxian!” Jiang Wanyin called out in worry while Lan Wangji’s indifferent expression cracked, replaced with concern.

Cangse Sanren, Wei Changze, Lan Wangji, and Jiang Wanyin were certain that they would kill that woman in their dreams because how dare that woman hurt Wei Wuxian?! How dare they?!

Furious, Jiang Wanyin charged forward, his palm directly toward the crown of her head, and Wen Chao screeched, “Jiaojiao! Jiaojiao! Quick get Jiaojiao back here!”

Wen Zhuliu frowned slightly and hurried over as he fended off the Jiang heir. He then carried Wang Lingjiao back, tossing her at the feet of Wen Chao.

Yu Ziyuan clenched her teeth as she watched her son stumble back after Wen Zhuliu had fended him off. If that man is still alive, she could have killed him right now. No one shall ever touch her son like this! Beside the Jiang Matriarch, the Jiang Patriarch's expression darkened as he remained silent, but Jiang Yanli could sense her father's silent anger.

Wang Lingjiao threw herself into the arms of Wen Chao, still retching blood and bawling her eyes out.

“Ugh, she’s disgusting,” a female cultivator covered her mouth as if about to vomit.

“She burned Wei Wuxian's chest with a seal and then she has the audacity to cry as if she were the one who was branded?” Nie Mingjue snarled, and the others agreed wholeheartedly.

Wei Wuxian felt strange hearing the Red Blade Master defend him, but it was a welcome feeling; for once, he felt warm.

Wen Chao’s expression turned angry as he exclaimed, “Get them!”

A number of cultivators felt the impulse to run forward to protect the disciples from the Wens, and yet after realizing they were only watching the memories of the past, they internally cursed.

“What a coward,” Jin Ling mumbled.

The Wen disciples ran forward to attack, but before they could do so, the gigantic beast inside the pool rise up from the shore and snatched one of the Wen disciples, and swallowed him in one go.

The disciples and some older cultivators gaped in horror, while Nie Huaisang and Ouyang Zizhen shrieked. The enemy of this battle was no longer the Wens, but this tortoise. If no one finds a way to escape to that cave, or even from the Wens, then all of them were bound to die at any moment.

“Please,” Jiang Yanli begged, her hand clutching her chest in worry. She is scared, so much she wants this to end. “Go somewhere else. Find a place to hide.”

Wen Chao looked up at the beast with unhidden fear and horror as it continues to devour the rest of the Wen Disciples. His body shook and he walked backward. Even an army cannot defeat a monster like this unless it is fought by a powerful cultivator like his father.

Many shuddered in fear and anxiousness. Well, of course, the elders, might have a bit of knowledge on how to escape, but in this case, they were still teenagers. How will they ever escape this thing? Furthermore, how did Lan Wangji and Wei Wuxian, who were both injured and famished, defeat this beast? What sort of weapon or talisman did they use to kill it?

“I swear to God I will kill those bastards in my dreams,” a female cultivator snarled.

The huge tortoise roared, shaking the cave walls once more. Snapping out of his fear, Wen Chao exclaimed, “Retreat! Withdraw now!” and ran away.

Madam Lan gasped, “They’re running away!”

“You fucker!” a man in his 30’s yelled viciously. “Don’t be a coward and stay where you are!”

“Yeah!” Jingyi concurred. “Don’t run away! You’re the one who led them all there. It is you who deserved death than them!”

Jiang Wanyin and Lan Wangji could swear they had the exact same thought as that man. Yu Ziyuan and Nie Mingjue's forms were trembling in rage, while Lan Qiren, Qingheng-jun, and Jiang Fengmian's disgust for the man were too evident.

When Jin Zixuan noticed the Wen's retreat, he reacted quickly, shouting, “After them!”

As the Jin disciples pursued, they picked up the weapons that the Wens had abandoned. Although their control over someone else’s sword would be non-existent, it was preferable to having none at all.

“Quick, block the exit!” Wen Chao ordered.

“Don’t you fucking dare!” Madam Jin snarled, rising from her seat in rage and concern. Although she knew it would happen eventually, witnessing this scene herself did not ease her heart and mind.

However, before Jin Zixuan could get close to them, an avalanche of dust and rocks fell from above, caused by the Wens.

“A-Xuan!” Jiang Yanli and Madam Jin shouted.

Somebody then cried, “They blocked the entrance!”

The cultivators clenched their fists and jaws. No one could say anything because everyone who had hoped that these kids would escape had been crushed like a bug. Meanwhile, Wei Changze and Cangse Sanren were only concerned about their son's injury, and Wei Wuxian, sensing their concern, smiled reassuringly.

Outside the cave, a Wen signal exploded in the air. Moments later, the Wen disciples eventually escaped as they all coughed heavily, making way for the approaching Wen Sect Heir.

Sizhui couldn’t help but glare at the man. He had been suppressing his emotions for some time, but after what happened to his Xian-gege, he simply couldn't. Jingyi fell silent for the second time after noticing his friend becoming increasingly enraged. He couldn't blame him; he would have reacted the same way. But what was frightening was that Sizhui rarely got angry, and when he did, he looked so much like Hanguang-jun that other Lan disciples avoided angering him as well.

“Sizhui, should—”

Jingyi shook his head, interrupting Zizhen's question. Understanding his message, they left the boy alone. Even Wen Qing and Wen Ning avoided talking to him, giving him space to think.

Wen Chao appeared, dragged by Wen Zhuliu by the collar. The latter appeared to be fine, displaying no signs of strain while literally carrying the former.

“Disciples of Yunmeng led the rebellion,” Wen Chao exclaimed. “Disciples from other clans abet the rebels!”

“What?!” Nie Mingjue stood up. “They were protecting and defending each other. Since when did our disciples rebel against you, you bastard?!”

“I’m sure that’s what he reported to Wen Ruohan,” Jiang Fengmian interjected solemnly. “That must be why Yunmeng Jiang was chosen as the next target.”

“Must be the reason?” Yu Ziyuan snapped. “Wen Chao was almost killed by Wei Wuxian—”

Jiang Fengmian’s eyes widened in disbelief, “San-niang!”

“I'm sure threatening and killing aren't the same thing,” Mianmian interrupted.

“The Lans and Jins were also the ones—”

“Excuse me?” Madam Lan and Lan Qiren both fumed as they stood up, while Qingheng-jun cast a cold glare at the Jiang matriarch. Madam Jin and Jin Zixuan, on the other hand, were taken aback when their clan got involved in the accusation.

Yu Ziyuan was about to speak when Wei Changze stood up as well. “Are you saying that all of this is my son’s fault?” he asked frostily. “Not only did you blame my son again, but also the Lans and Jins for acting righteously?”

“Father,” Wei Wuxian called but Wei Changze ignored him.

“No one’s at fault here. Everyone was defending and protecting each other, as Nie Mingjue had said,” Cangse Sanren added coldly. She's too tired to yell at this woman right now. “Only the Wens, specifically Wen Chao and Wang Lingjiao, are to blame.”

Many people would agree with Cangse Sanren, and even Jiang Wanyin and Jiang Yanli appeared displeased with their mother.

“San-niang,” Jiang Fengmian whispered warningly. “Please stop.”

Yu Ziyuan scoffed, tired of expressing herself anyway. A group of disciples sighed in relief as they watched the scene unfold in front of them. They can't stand it when clans fight, especially when the immortal is watching them intently and making no move to stop them, unlike before. From the looks of it, it looks like she’s observing them from a distance.

Wen Chao pants heavily and demanded, “Get me reinforcements! Lay siege to Mt. Muxi! If anyone gets out, kill them on sight!”

“What?!” Song Lan exclaimed in disbelief. “Are you declaring war on all clans?!”

“They have been declaring war from the moment they attacked Cloud Recesses,” Xiao Xingchen grimaced. “It seems they're too desperate to get rid of the great clans.”

“That much isn’t surprising. The Wen Clan has been removing minor clans here and there. It's only a matter of time before they target the great clans to expand their power,” Baoshan Sanren explained, and everyone knew she was right.

Qingheng-jun clenched his fists tightly, attempting to control himself. Lan Xichen looked over, noticing the change in his father's expression and the tightness of his fists.

“Are you okay, Father?” He softly inquired.

Qingheng-jun was silent for a moment before he reluctantly responded, “I am fine.”

He obviously wasn't. Wen Chao issued an order to kill the trapped disciples if they escaped. His A-Zhan had already broken his leg, and his A-Huan was nowhere to be found. When he heard Wen Chao's order, he was bombarded with negative thoughts. Although he was relieved that his sons were still alive, he couldn't get the thought of them being discovered by the Wens and tortured out of his head.

“Father,” Lan Xichen called, jolting him out of his reverie. “Everything’s going to be fine.”

“Yes,” Lan Wangji interjected. His face is indifferent, but he could also sense his father is not fine. “Rest assured, I will be saved thanks to Jiang Wanyin.”

Jiang Wanyin, having heard their conversation and his name, turned to the second jade, his eyes wide and his mouth gaping. He certainly wasn't expecting the man, who had hated him for the majority of his life, to thank him in front of his parents. Qingheng-jun and Madam Lan bowed their heads as they faced the Jiang Sect Leader.

“We are grateful,” Qingheng-jun smiled.

Jiang Wanyin did not know what to make of that statement, so he said, “It’s no problem.”

Within the cave, the cloud of dust and the falling rocks have finally settled. Fortunately, Jin Zixuan was quick and he managed to dodge the falling rocks despite the dust cloud and darkness. However, that also meant that they were now trapped.

Deep underground, all that was left was a couple of burning torches, igniting the young, hesitant faces. Nobody could say anything.

“It’s completely blocked,” Jin Zixuan informed and frowned. “That hell of a couple can really do such things, can’t they?”

“Yeah, no shit,” Jiang Wanyin deadpanned.

The massive beast finally retreated, returning to the lake and letting out one last growl.

Behind a rock pillar, Nie Huaisang peered out, “So we are…stuck here? Ahhh! Together with a man-eating beast?!”

Nie Mingjue’s heart was raising. He barely keeps his younger brother out of sight for fear of losing him. To think that he almost lost him because of this stupid camp and because of Wen Chao and that whore. He clenched his fists as he stared at his younger brother's trembling body. Why did he even agree to send him to their enemy's territory knowing all sorts of possibilities could happen?

“Da-ge,” Nie Huaisang called out. “Breathe properly. I am fine.”

And so Nie Mingjue did, but his heart and mind never relaxed.

“It’s fine,” Jiang Yanli whispered. “The tortoise retreated. You’re safe for now. You are all fine.”

Jin Ling and Jin Zixuan began to worry. It was like she was not only saying that because she knows but she was reassuring herself.

Jin Ling held her hand, “Mother, they’re going to be fine.”

“Yes,” Jin Zixuan concurred. “Trust me, A-Li, we’ll be alright.”

Jiang Yanli sighed, forcing herself to believe them, “Okay.”

One of the disciples murmured, “It’s alright even if we can’t get out. My father and mother will come and find me. If they hear of this, they’ll definitely search for me here.”

A few of the people agreed. Immediately after, somebody responded in a quivering voice, “They must think that we’re still undergoing indoctrination at Qishan. How could they possibly search for us? Besides, after the Wen Sect’s people ran away, they definitely won’t tell the truth. They’ll definitely make up some excuse, and we can only stay down here.”

It's not surprising that the disciples are aware of their situation, especially in relation to the Wens. If their disciples did not return by the time allotted for the camp to end, it is their initiative to suspect that the Wens had something to do with their inability to return home. Though what’s worse here is that even if they knew that the Wens was making bullshit excuses, they knew they couldn't act recklessly because of Wen Ruohan, and that alone makes everyone's blood boil with rage.

Jiang Fengmian's eyes grew dark. What would have happened if Jiang Cheng had not returned home? What would have happened if he hadn't immediately informed him that Lan Wangji and Wei Ying were still trapped inside the cave? In any case, he didn't want to think about what would have happened to his son, Wei Ying and Lan Wangji.

Another disciple deflated from their place, “We can only wait here in the cave…without any food…along with a beast….”

Jiang Wanyin slowly walked over, propping Wei Wuxian up. They happened to hear the *‘without any food’* part of the conversation, so Wei Wuxian smiled.

“Jiang Cheng, there’s a piece of cooked meat here. You want to eat it?”

Leave it to Wei Wuxian to try to lighten up the mood, even though he is seriously injured. Some were annoyed that he was trying to make a joke despite his situation, while others were relieved and concerned for him.

“Why are you so irritating?” Jiang Wanyin hissed. “Joking at moments like this. Can you be serious for once?”

“The atmosphere is so tense,” Wei Wuxian responded as he shrugged. “Might as well try to lessen it.”

Annoyed and concerned, Jiang Wanyin exclaimed, “Get lost! You really haven’t learned your lesson, have you? Just what situation do you think we’re in? You don’t know how much I want to sew your lips together right now.”

“He was just trying to lighten up the mood,” Jin Zixuan remarked. “Why are you so angry?”

“Shut up, peacock,” Jiang Wanyin glared. “You don’t think I know that?”

“All right, enough,” Jiang Yanli interrupted, giggling a bit.

Lan Wangji's light-colored eyes landed on them. Immediately after, they landed on Mianmian, who followed behind them, at a loss as to what to do.

Tears streamed down her cheeks as she sobbed, her hands clenched around her robe, repeating, “I'm sorry, I'm sorry, I'm sorry,” over and over.

Hearing her apologize several times broke the cultivators' hearts, especially Madam Jin and Jin ZIxuan. Mianmian, on the other hand, regarded the scene with sadness as her hand reached for her face. What if the seal had landed directly on her face? A Wen seal scar on her face would have caused her great shame and humiliation. She turned to face Wei Wuxian, who is now smiling at her. Really, Wei Wuxian is too kind for everybody, and this kindness

would be his weakness. Anyone could take advantage of him, but knowing Wei Wuxian, he definitely will refuse to be taken advantage of.

“Thank you,” she whispered. “So much.”

Wei Wuxian chuckled, “It’s nothing, Mianmian.”

Wei Wuxian plugged his ears, “Hey, stop crying, alright? I'm the one who was burned, not you. Don't tell me that you want me to cheer you up? How about you cheer me up?”

“You look cheerful enough already,” Jin Ling pointed out.

Wei Changze and Cangse Sanren paused for a moment to reflect. Did their Wei Ying constantly try to cheer himself and others up in order to hide his pain and not worry others? Did he always hurt himself in the past and set aside his pain? Did he develop this habit after being hurt or punished constantly? Just thinking about it made the couple's hearts constrict in the worst way possible.

“Okay, enough, Jiang Cheng, stop carrying me. It's not like my leg is broken.”

“Then don’t push yourself too hard!” Jiang Wanyin scolded, worry evident on his face.

The girls circled around Mianmian and began to sniffle together. On the side, Lan Wangji's gaze returned as he turned around to leave.

“Oh? Is Wangji feeling what I think he's feeling?” Lan Xichen smiled a bit mischievously.

“No,” Lan Wangji said flatly.

“Lan Zhan, lying is forbidden,” Wei Wuxian smirked, pleased to see the younger Lan Zhan jealous.

“We are not in Cloud Recesses,” Lan Wangji countered, and Wei Wuxian burst out laughing.

He may have denied it, but Lan Xichen and Wei Wuxian knew the truth anyway.

Lan Wangji stared at the pool, his gaze calculating, stepping closer to get a better look.

Noticing him, Jiang Wanyin asked, "Young Master Lan, where are you going? The beast is still waiting in the pool."

“Return to the pool,” Lan Wangji informed. “There is a way to leave.”

“There is?!” Multiple cultivators chorused in disbelief. Where and how did he even know how to get out of this dark, closed cave?

“Yes,” Wei Wuxian answered instead. “If you look closely, you will know.”

They all returned their gaze to the screen, eager to know the answer, but it seems like no one knew the answer except for Jiang Wanyin, Nie Huaisang, and Jin Zixuan.

“There are no maple trees in the cave,” Lan Wangji pointed out, turning to face his fellow disciples. “But maple leaves in this pool are fresh.”

“What?” An unknown cultivator frowned in confusion. “What does your escape have to do with maple leaves?”

As if struck by an understanding, Sizhui’s eyes widened, and smiled, “I see.”

Mirroring the cultivator's reaction, the disciples also muttered, “What?”

“Maple leaves in the pool?”

“What does that mean?”

Although the sentence sounded rather strange, Wei Wuxian understood at once, “Ah, I get it now.”

“You two are meant to be,” A-Qing muttered in bewilderment. The environmental awareness this couple has is truly astounding. Rarely anyone has that kind of skill. “How did you two even figure it out?”

“Obviously by observing around,” Jingyi replied matter-of-factly.

Atop the dark pool that the beast dwelled in, there were indeed a few leaves. But, inside the cave, there were neither maple trees nor a trace of any human activity and, near the entrance, there was only a banyan tree. The maple leaves, however, were as red as fire, flaunting how fresh they were.

Lan Wangji turned his gaze to Wei Wuxian, “Below the cliff, there’s a maple forest on the creek’s bank.”

Qingheng-jun, Lan Xichen, Madam Lan, and Lan Qiren smiled when they realized what Lan Wangji was trying to say. Lan Wangji once again impressed the cultivators!

“Good job, A-Zhan!” Madam Lan exclaimed, and Lan Wangji's face softened as he saw how pleased his mother was.

“Thank you, mother.”

Jiang Wanyin may have taken a while to figure it out, but he eventually did and said, “At the bottom of the pool, it's likely that there's a hole connected with water from the outside. That would've brought in the maple leaves in the forest creek.”

Someone spokes in a timid voice, “But... How do we know if the hole is large enough to let people through? What if it's really small and it's only a slit?”

Jin Zixuan frowned, “And the beast is still watching stubbornly over the pool.”

The reminder that the beast was still under the pool, probably sleeping, made them curse internally. For a brief moment, they completely forgot its existence. The chances of escaping are extremely slim. With no proper weapons to render it incapable of fighting or killing it, they’ll remain trapped there until someone comes to their rescue. They could, of course, lure it out, but within this closed cave where large rocks could fall on anyone at any time, they couldn’t risk it either.

Yu Ziyuan clenched her fist and glared at the injured Wei Wuxian. She really despised the fact that she couldn't help her son.

“You better get A-Cheng out of there, Wei Wuxian,” she hissed. “I will not forgive you if you do not prioritize A-Cheng’s safety.”

“Why is your son’s safety my son’s responsibility?” Cangse Sanren inquired icily, and Jiang Wanyin flinched slightly. “Why must your son always come first before my son, Yu Ziyuan?”

“Because he is a Yunmeng Jiang Sect Heir!” Yu Ziyuan snarled. “The heir in the great clans should come first!”

“A-Niang!” Jiang Wanyin exclaimed, his face flushed with rage. “An heir or not, I prioritize my own safety! It is no one’s duty to look after me!”

Yu Ziyuan fumed, “What are you talking about? We let Wei Wuxian stay in Lotus Pier for him to look after you—”

She did not get to finish her words when Qingheng-jun glared at her.

She was again silenced by the silencing spell!

She glared at the Lan Sect Leader, but the man glared in return.

I don't tolerate this kind of behavior, especially when it involves my son's husband,” he stated coldly, and the Lan disciples swear they saw a bit of Hanguang-jun in him, but he's twice as scary.

Cangse Sanren and Wei Changze sighed in relief and expressed gratitude to the Lan Sect Leader.

Wei Wuxian lifted his robe lapel, one hand fanning at the wound beneath his clothes, “If there's hope, then let's move. No matter what, it's better than waiting for our parents here and doing nothing. So, what if it's watching over the pool? We can just lure it out.”

“Are you crazy?!” Xiao Xingchen exclaimed in shock. All of the cultivators also stared at him, their eyes bulging as if they were going to fall any minute. Leave it to Wei Wuxian to do something crazy yet again.

“Of course, it'll be Wei Wuxian's idea to lure the beast out, as if that isn't the riskiest thing to do,” Lan Qiren sighed exasperatedly, though he couldn't help but be concerned. The mere thought of luring the beast out is suicidal, but this is Wei Wuxian. He is capable and he is a natural leader. He had no idea where this trust and faith came from, but Wei Wuxian is astute, and he is aware of his abilities.

“What?” Wei Wuxian asked, perplexed. “I can't just leave us there without doing something. If I think I can do something, then I’ll do it.”

A while later, after some negotiation, the group of boys again went the same way they had come. Hiding in a hole within the cave, they quietly peered at the beast. The majority of its body was still submerged in the pool. The long body of a snake extended from its turtle shell. It approached the shore, opened its jaw, and softly clenched the corpse between its teeth before shrinking back into its dark, castle-like shell. It seemed to want to savor it in there.

The cultivators made no attempt to conceal their disgust. Why is the memory allowing them to see this? It was clearly not as important as what is currently happening to the disciples.

Then Wei Wuxian tossed out a torch. It crashed into one corner of the cave. The sound was amplified even more in the dead silence of the underground. The beast's head slid out of its shell at once. Its bright pupils reflected the blazing torch. It slowly extended its neck out, instinctively drawn to things that emitted light and heat.

Behind it, Jiang Wanyin noiselessly dove into the water.

“A-Cheng,” Jiang Yanli whispered. “Please be careful..”

Given that Lotus Pier was surrounded by bodies of water, it’s needless to say, Jiang Wanyin was a skilled swimmer. The Jiang disciples' swimming abilities were all exceptional, so drowning would not be an issue for him. Though some cultivators couldn’t help but worry since the beast was still in the water, where he could be easily snatched. Yu Ziyuan was enraged, but she couldn't express herself verbally, so she resorted to growling. Of course, no one bothered to look at her other than her husband, who appears to be worried about her.

‘You worry about me being like this, but you’re not worried about your son diving underwater with the beast in there ready to eat him alive?!’ she wanted to say this but couldn’t.

“If you’re worried for A-Cheng, don’t be,” Jiang Fengmian said, holding one of her hands. “He is capable. He can do it.”

Despite his efforts to reassure her, it did not bring her peace of mind or heart.

The moment Jiang Wanyin had dived, the ripples disappeared immediately. The surface of the water didn’t even do so much as to crease.

Everyone stared at the water, glancing at the beast at times. Seeing that the large, black head had always been hesitantly circling around the torch, debating between approaching or not, everyone’s hearts tightened.

People from the memories as well as those within the temple prayed for Jiang Wanyin's safety. Even Jin Ling couldn't stop himself from biting his lower lip. His uncle would always endanger himself whenever some Jiang disciples are struggling or the situation gets out of hand, especially in night-hunting, and Jin Ling would always ask if he was okay or if he's gained injuries after the hunt to ease his anxious heart. He lost his other ‘uncle’, he can’t lose his dearest jiujiu.

Suddenly, as though having finally decided to get a taste of what this really was, it moved its nose close. Yet, it was slightly scorched by the searing flames. The neck of the beast shrunk away at once. Two streams of water vapor shot with rage from its nostrils, putting the torch out.

At this point in time, Jiang Wanyin just happened to have swum out of the water and took in a deep breath. Sensing that its territory had been intruded on, it shook its head and plunged toward him.

“Jiang Cheng!”

“A-Cheng!”

“Jiujiu!”

Yu Ziyuan will forever curse Wei Wuxian for this!

***‘Jiang Cheng!’* Wei Wuxian reacted quickly, biting his finger and drew something illegible on his palm, rushing out of the pillar they hid in and slapped his palm onto the ground.**

Then, directly before him, a fire as tall as a person sprouted from the ground.

They were once again impressed, despite their concerns.

“Good work,” Lan Xichen praised, causing Wei Wuxian to feel flustered.

Now that his tactic for distracting the beast had worked perfectly, Jiang Wanyin used the opportunity to climb ashore.

“There’s a hole at the bottom, not too small!” He shouted.

“How small is not too small?” Wei Wuxian hurriedly asked.

“About half a dozen can pass at a time!”

The cultivators are immediately relieved. If they can keep the beast distracted for as long as possible, they will almost certainly be able to escape immediately.

“Yess!” Zizhen cheered. “Go now!”

“Go now while the beast is still distracted!” A-Qing yelled.

Although they were relieved, they couldn't hope because the beast was still there, potentially blocking the hole with its shell or body. They, once again, cursed Wen Chao for trapping the disciples there.

“Follow his lead,” Madam Jin said, his tone laced with worry.

Having the same feeling the cultivators are feeling right now, Wei Wuxian turned around and shouted, “Great. Everyone, listen up! Follow Jiang Cheng and swim into the underwater hole. Those who aren’t injured, watch out for those who can’t. Half a dozen can pass at a time, so nobody rushes. Now, go!”

Wei Wuxian is really a natural-born leader, Baoshan Sanren opined, how, in a cave with the heirs of four great sects, everyone indisputably followed Wei Wuxian’s instructions. Then again in their current situation, no one had the gall to object to his instructions as they were desperate to escape the cave and the beast.

Nie Mingjue and Jiang Fengmian thought it was unfortunate that Wei Wuxian is not an heir of a sect. With his unwavering confidence, intelligence, skills, and inventive mind, he would be one of the cultivation world's greatest leaders, if not the greatest. But, heir or not, Wei Wuxian has no desire to place himself in a higher position, and with his energetic, carefree, and mischievous spirit, they doubt any sect leaders (especially Lan Qiren) would like him at all.

As soon as he finished speaking, the flame that had sprouted slowly died down. He backed off ten-or-so steps into another direction, then hit the ground with his palm again, letting out another bout of fire. The beast’s scarlet eyes appeared golden through the light of the flames. Burning mad, it waved its limbs and climbed toward the fire, dragging above it its mountain of a body.

As soon as Sizhui realized the situation, his eyes widened, his head turning to Wei Wuxian, “X-Xian-gege…don’t tell me you’re sacrificing yourself again by staying there?”

Cangse Sanren and Jin Ling shot up, their eyes on Wei Wuxian. With a shaky breath, Cangse Sanren let out a small, “No, you can’t.”

“I…” Wei Wuxian struggled to speak. “I need to divert the beast's attention so they can swim underwater.”

“Don’t you dare!” Jin Ling exclaimed, his face slowly turning red. “Why do you always sacrifice yourself for the sake of others?!”

Jiang Wanyin lowered his head as a result, because not only is his brother a selfless idiot, but he is as well. Though Wei Wuxian made far more sacrifices than him.

“I am not someone important,” Wei Wuxian responded, his voice flat and low. “The disciples with me, on the other hand, had families waiting for them to return home. They’re needed—”

“Wei Ying!” Lan Wangji, for the first time, exclaimed. His body is shaking and his eyes are both angry and sad. “Do not say that. Do not! You are important to some people, to me!”

Wei Wuxian looked at his husband with wide eyes and a gaping mouth, and Lan Wangji despises the fact that his husband is still insecure to this day. He despises the fact that he can't say the right words or prove his love for him through his actions.

“You are important to your parents, to your brother, sister, nephew, our son, and to me. Your life is as significant as others,” Lan Wangji said, his hand cupping his husband’s cheeks. Wei Wuxian stared with teary eyes and realized, ‘Ah, my insecurity is hurting him again.’

Cangse Sanren and Wei Changze exchanged smiles. Lan Wangji really deserved their son.

“Yes,” Sizhui interjected. “Hanguang-jun is right, Xian-gege.”

A number of disciples agreed, and Wei Wuxian couldn't help but laugh. Jiang Yanli's and Jiang Wanyin's hearts were filled with overwhelming fondness and sadness, but they were happy for their brother that he had people who loved and cared for him.

Jiang Wanyin turned to him, shocked, and raged, “What are you doing?!”

“What are you doing? Get them down there!” Wei Wuxian exclaimed.

“Follow them!” Song Lan demanded, despite having overheard the conversation, he still wanted the young Wei Wuxian to escape with them, but his demand was completely unheard.

“Leave now!”

By now, the beast had already been successfully lured out of the water and onto the shore. Jiang Wanyin clenched his teeth and exclaimed, “Everyone, come here. Those who can swim alone, stand on the left side; those who can’t stand on the right side!”

The disciples followed Jiang Wanyin’s and Wei Wuxian’s instructions, but not far away was one Lan disciple with a complicated expression on his face.

“Su She!” Lan Xichen and Lan Qiren hissed. As much as it was forbidden for them to hate their fellow cultivator, they certainly despise him.

“What is planning on doing?!” Jingyi scowled, his expression becoming increasingly agitated.

“Stay the fuck away from him!” Jin Ling exclaimed, feeling the same resentment as the others.

Jin Zixuan and Jiang Yanli couldn't even reprimand their son for cursing; their attention was focused on Su She.

Wei Wuxian's fire was weakening, and as a result, his body began trembling because of expending too much spiritual energy. He swayed slightly, a signal that exhaustion is beginning to overtake him.

But then, a pain burst through his arm.

“Su She!!” The cultivators chorused furiously. Lan Wangji and Jiang Wanyin glared at the man as if their eyes was enough to kill him. Wei Wuxian, on the other hand, had an unreadable expression on his face, but Lan Wangji can tell he was angry and torn on the inside. He understood—that man had in fact destroyed his husband’s life, and that is something Lan Wangji could never forgive, ever.

“That Lan disciple,” Cangse Sanren started, her expression dark and her voice intimidatingly low. “Where is he?”

Lan Qiren felt humiliated and ashamed for bringing him in as a Lan disciple.

“He’s dead,” Lan Xichen responded, his expression somewhere between neutral and sad. He resisted the urge to sigh as the image of the man who had been with him for years appeared in his mind.

“How unfortunate,” Cangse Sanren muttered. “I would’ve liked it if he suffered from my hands for hurting my A-Ying.”

The disciples and a few other cultivators shared her sentiments. Wei Wuxian sighed, but his mother's overprotectiveness warmed his heart.

Wen Qing felt helpless on the sidelines. She's a doctor, and her hand itched to work once more. She could have aided Wei Wuxian if she could have passed through the screen, but this is only a memory, and all she can do is watch him suffer and sacrifice himself once more.

Wen Ning noticed her despondent look and immediately knew why.

“A-Jie can definitely help him soon,” Wen Ning said quietly enough for only she to hear.

That only made her feel worse knowing what her younger brother meant.

Wei Wuxian gasped out in pain and glared at his attacker.

“No, I didn’t mean to,” Su She said with difficulty and dropped the bow immediately as if it burned him. “I was trying to shoot the beast.”

“You were clearly targeting him!” Nie Huaisang and Jiang Wanyin exclaimed, and everyone agreed wholeheartedly.

Assuming that Su She really targeted Wei Wuxian instead of the beast, what were his intentions then? Did he really intend to trap the Jiang Head Disciple there? To make him the live bait while they triumph over their successful escape? With Wei Wuxian’s blood soaking the ground and the water, attracting the beast, does he think that he will be the only one to survive?

Well, apparently he’s more stupid than they thought.

“What a fool,” Qingheng-jun remarked.

Lan Wangji, who saw what happened, was overcome with rage and growled, “You..!”

Wei Wuxian didn't have time to draw the arrow. He cursed again, hitting the ground with his palm after the flame appeared.

“Leave!” Wei Wuxian ordered. “Don’t get in my way!”

“Do as he says!” Madam Jin growled, frustrated that she couldn't help her son get out of there, and then there was this fool who thought he was doing the right thing only to make things worse.

Something about this scene awed Lan Qiren. Although he had already witnessed Wei Wuxian's heroism, this was beyond anyone's capability without anyone's help, but right now he was doing it alone and determined despite his exhaustion slowly taking over. It was as if it was his instinct to do everything on his own. He is truly embodying the Jiang Sect’s motto.

‘Attempt the impossible,’ his mind provided. This was truly inspiring to witness.

“Wei Wuxian!” Jiang Wanyin screamed in concern, “What are you doing? Get over here!”

“I will!” Wei Wuxian shouted back.

“Hurry!” Xiao Xingchen pleaded. The beast was becoming more ferocious by the second, and he was afraid they wouldn't be able to escape.

Beside Jiang Wanyin were three disciples who couldn’t swim. This could be considered the last batch. He knew that they weren’t able to wait and had to dive into the water without Wei Wuxian.

Then, Wei Wuxian pulled out the arrow.

“No!!” All of them screamed in horror.

The scene of blood roused the beast's attention to Wei Wuxian. Its neck suddenly grew in length faster than ever and its jaws opened wide.

Wei Wuxian's face turned pale as he realized what was about to happen and he clutched his husband's hand tightly. Lan Wangji squeezed his hand back in comfort.

Before Wei Wuxian could think of what to do next, his body tilted as somebody shoved him out of the way. It was Lan Wangji, and with this opportunity, the jaws of the beast had closed, biting down on his leg.

“A-Zhan!!” Qingheng-jun, Madam Lan, and Lan Xichen shot up from their seats in horror and fear, while Lan Qiren was too stunned to even react.

Everyone in the temple had a terrified expression on their face…

“This is all Su She’s fault!” Jin Zixuan growled. The beast would have remained distracted if he hadn't shot Wei Wuxian.

Wei Wuxian couldn't help but close his eyes when he saw this again. He tried to breathe properly and relax, but his anxious heart wouldn't let him. Lan Wangji embraced him tightly right away.

“I am here,” he said quietly, and those three words brought relief and comfort to Wei Wuxian.

Biting down tightly on Lan Wangji’s leg, the tortoise swung its head up and dragged him away.

“Lan Zhan!!”

Madam Lan screamed.

Lan Wangji tried to escape, but his efforts were completely futile. The tortoise continued dragging the second jade closer so that it could savor its meal within the safety of its impenetrable shell. Before the tortoise's head began to sink, Wei Wuxian broke into a sprint and threw himself over, clinging to one of the teeth on its upper jaw.

They were all speechless and scared. The bite of the tortoise looked excruciatingly painful that it looked like it would tear away Lan Wangji's limb, and now Wei Wuxian is throwing himself over to save him. How will Wei Wuxian save him now?

The disciples had now witnessed the story of how Wei Wuxian and Lan Wangji were trapped in a cave with the tortoise. They had assumed that the two would easily defeat the tortoise, but seeing this, it seemed that they had gone through more hardships than they had anticipated. Seeing them struggling, injured, and saving each other without helping them was torture. They never want to see Hanguang-jun and Senior Wei fighting for their lives like this again.

"Please," Jiang Yanli begged. "God, please save them!"

His strength could never have been able to compete with such a monster's. Yet, under the life-or-death situation, superhuman strength had exploded within him.

Wei Wuxian's feet were propped up against the shell of the beast while his hands clung onto the fang no matter what. Like a prick of some kind, he used his body to block its path, preventing it from shrinking inside, and from getting the chance to enjoy the delicacy.

"Go, Senior Wei!" The disciples chorused. "You can do it!"

Wei Changze's and Cangse Sanren's hearts were racing erratically with fear. Seeing how their son is trying so hard to free Lan Wangji from the jaws of the beast is breaking them. The strength their son has now would not last long, whereas the beast, with its size, has its innate strength, strong enough to pull the two inside its impenetrable shell and die.

The beast didn’t want to eat Lan Wangji until he was inside its shell, so it continued fighting Wei Wuxian for dominance.

But even upside down, Lan Wangji’s shock was so evident that it was visible in his expression.

Lan Wangji even remembered his heart beating abnormally at the time. Wei Ying really had gone to great lengths to save him. Oh, he was head over heels in love with this man.

Wei Wuxian’s right hand continued to grab onto the upper fang while his left hand clenched onto the lower fang. His hands pushing in opposite directions at the same time, he forced strength into his arms as though his life depended on it. The vein at his forehead protruded so much that it seemed to be on the verge of bursting. His face was so blood-red.

Not only is Wei Wuxian fighting the beast to save Lan Wangji, had forgotten that Wei Wuxian had already expended his spiritual energy and was exhausted and tired. He has the strength now, but once his exhaustion sets in and he fails to extract Lan Wangji from that beast's jaws, they're done.

Jiang Yanli and Cangse Sanren repeated silent pleas in their minds. Jiang Wanyin's fists were turning white, Jin Zixuan swallowed nervously, and Nie Huaisang crept behind his elder brother, his body trembling in fear.

Then, as if the gods heard their pleas, the two rows of fangs that were already deep into Lan Wangji’s blood and bones were slowly being forced open.

They all gaped in astonishment.

Jin Ling gasped in a breath, “No way.”

“H-How?!” an old cultivator asked in bewilderment.

Lan Wangji could only feel smug at their reaction. Of course, his husband is strong.

With a loud crack, Wei Wuxian successfully broke the jaws apart, and Lan Wangji fell into the water.

“Yess!!” The disciples cheered loudly.

They all sighed in relief. Wei Wuxian had saved Lan Wangji with only his strength and determination. Madam Lan's tears streamed down her cheeks, and she sobbed quietly into Qingheng-jun's chest overjoyed and relieved that her A-Zhan was no longer in danger. Lan Xichen, Lan Qiren, and Qingheng-jun felt the same sentiment, the weight on their shoulders had finally lifted.

Seeing that the second jade is now safe, the almost deity-like strength of Wei Wuxian disappeared at once. Unable to hold the beast’s jaws in place any longer, he suddenly let go and fell into the water as well.

“Wei Ying!” Wei Changze exclaimed, his body moving to catch his son, but he soon realized he was only watching a memory.

“Father, Mother,” Wei Wuxian called out smiling, “I am safe.”

When they realized their son was nearby, they breathed a long sigh of relief.

A loud smacking sound echoed, and Su She collapsed to the ground.

“How dare you!” Jiang Wanyin exclaimed, enraged.

“Jiang-xiong, what’s the use of punching him now?” Nie Huaisang inquired, holding Jiang Wanyin's arm to prevent him from attacking the other again. “The most urgent matter at hand is to get Wei-xiong out!”

“He deserved that punch,” Jingyi scoffed, but he’s smiling. “Sad he didn’t receive any more.”

Sizhui lightly slapped his friend's arm.

On the other hand, Madam Jin can finally breathe normally again, “They finally escaped.”

“That was so fast,” Song Lan muttered. Was the distance of the hole connected to the other bank that close, or was the memory sped up?

“Now they need to move before someone catches them,” Madam Lan said, wiping her tears.

“I…I was really trying to help!” Su She cried.

“Shut the fuck up!” Jiang Wanyin exclaimed. “What help did attempt other than endangering us more?!”

Behind Su She, Jin Zixuan scoffed and glared at his back, “No one but yourself knows what your real intentions were.”

At the time, young Jin Zixuan was annoyed, but the adult Jin Zixuan was raging inside. What would’ve happened if Su She attacked Wei Wuxian and they had no way of escaping? They'd be trapped in the dark cave for days, if not weeks, with a large beast, and those who hadn't practiced inedia would have died of hunger.

Madam Jin recognized her son’s arrogance, but she also knew he was righteous as well.

Su She deflated from Jin Zixuan's words, probably feeling guilty for what he did.

"What should we do now?" Mianmian asked. "The whole is blocked and the dreadful beast is still inside."

Jiang Wanyin was clearly angry, but he tried to calm himself down and glanced at Mianmian, responding, "We should ask for help, separately."

Jiang Fengmian nodded in approval and Jiang Wanyin beamed at his reaction, while Yu Ziyuan scowled. They should all go now that they have the opportunity because if they waste time standing there, the Wens will undoubtedly capture them.

But then a number of arrows were fired, striking several disciples who collapsed on the ground.

The cultivators gasped in shock.

"What?!" Nie Mingjue stood up, anger and impatience rising. "Get out of there right now!"

Too late. Above a rock cliff were Wen Chao, Wang Lingjiao, and some Wen Disciples with their arrows aimed at the escapees.

"Asking for help?" Wen Chao asked as he laughed mockingly. "None of you are leaving!"

"No!" Jiang Yanli screamed.

Lan Qiren, who was on the verge of bursting, finally did not hold back and exclaimed, "Wen Chao!"

Wangji and Wei Wuxian, both injured, were still down there. With Wen Chao ambushing the disciples right away, the rescue will be delayed as well.

Jiang Fengmian glared at Wen Chao, his eyes digging holes in his body.

“Kill them!” Wen Chao commanded, and hundreds of arrows were fired at the disciples.

“No!!”

“Fuck you Wen Chao!!”

All cultivators shook in rage. How dare he? How dare he command his dogs to kill their disciples? How dare he declare war on the great clans?!

With the rush of bubbles, they were brought back underwater. Wei Wuxian swam desperately all the way to Lan Wangji's sinking body, wrapping an arm around his chest and swimming back to the surface, careful not to jostle his bleeding leg.

The cultivators' anxious hearts from the previous scene were exacerbated by this scene. Although they were relieved that both had escaped the beast's jaws, the memory of the second jade being dragged away and Wei Wuxian desperately trying to save him did not make their hearts feel any better.

Rolling onto the shore, he threw Lan Wangji onto his back (a once-in-a-blue-moon opportunity to carry the second jade in this manner without futilely refusing him) and took off running.

Lan Wangji’s ears turned red.

A moment later, Lan Wangji regained consciousness and coughed out the water in his lungs, only to realize that he was being carried on the back by a menace.

"Hey!" Wei Wuxian pouted.

"Due to his shock, Lan Wangji only blurted out, "You..!"

"It's me!" Wei Wuxian beamed. "Are you pleasantly surprised?"

The transition from two cultivators fighting their life to Wei Wuxian joking perplexed the cultivators, but some snorted and even rolled their eyes at the question.

"How are you joking right now when you just escaped the tortoise?" Jin Zixuan asked, who is looking a bit stupid right now.

"That's just who I am," Wei Wuxian smiled smugly.

'And how is 'smug' your initial reaction to his question?' All cultivators thought simultaneously, sweat dropping.

Hovering on his back, Lan Wangji's voice possessed the rare emotional fluctuation, "How could this be pleasant?! Let me down!"

"Are you embarrassed, Wangji?" Lan Xichen teased. "It's okay to—"

"Do not speak further, brother."

Lan Xichen giggled anyway.

“Hanguang-jun, when is in close proximity to Senior Wei, talks a lot,” Sizhui observed with a smile. He only speaks when absolutely necessary, but by other people's standards, he is a chatterbox now, as opposed to before he met Wei Wuxian.

“Yeah,” Zizhen smiled as well. “I noticed that too.”

“Huh,” Nie Huaisang nodded. “Good observation.”

Wei Wuxian smirked, “That’s because I am persistent and hard to resist right, Lan Zhan?”

Ears red, Lan Wangji gave a small, “Mn.”

Wei Wuxian squealed, and Cangse Sanren and Wei Changze smiled fondly, watching how their son was so in love.

Wei Wuxian laughed delightedly and refused to rest his mouth even as he was running for his life, “If I let you down just because you say so, doesn’t that really make me lose face?”

Some cultivators sighed in exasperation while Cangse Sanren giggled.

The roar of the beast that had come from behind them vibrated within their eats and their chests. Both felt blood rush up to their throats. Wei Wuxian hurried to shut his mouth so that he could focus on running away. In prevention of the beast catching up with fury, he purposely chose to duck into thin holes that the turtle shell couldn’t pass through.

“Smart,” Madam Jin praised, because yes, that was indeed a wise move. If they'd gone through large holes where the beast's head could reach them and there was no other tunnel to

run to, then they'd have to find another way to escape, which is to say, they can't because Lan Wangji cannot fight with his leg injury and Wei Wuxian is tired.

Without having any rest, Wei Wuxian didn't even know how long he had run. Only when he was unable to hear any more sounds that he finally slowed down.

Wei Wuxian's guard was lowered as soon as his speed decreased. However, he could smell the scent of blood. Feeling behind him backhandedly, his right hand was covered in a wet crimson.

The Lan Family and Sizhui felt like their heart stopped once again. If his leg were not treated soon, then—

But the current Lan Wangji is fine. His leg is absolutely fine.

***'Lan Zhan's injury is worsening again,'* Wei Wuxian realized, all of his cheerfulness earlier was gone in an instant.**

Feeling that they were probably far enough away for their location to be safe, Wei Wuxian spun around and laid Lan Wangji gently onto the ground.

The cultivators resisted the urge to wince. They can tell how painful it is for Lan Wangji just by looking at the blood and the injury. Worse, his leg injury wasn't even completely healed to begin with.

On the side, the Lan Family wanted to walk forward as if they wanted to kneel beside Lan Wangji to see how bad his leg injury was and if they could do anything to relieve his pain. Wen Qing wanted to diagnose the man as well, but it was all futile; this was all a memory. There is nothing they can do to heal him.

After Wei Wuxian laid Lan Wangji on the ground, he pulled him closer so the second jade's head was laid on his lap. Wei Wuxian's desire for Lan Wangji's comfort made

sense, but this moment felt very personal, if not extremely intimate.

Wei Wuxian and Lan Wangji exchanged smiles.

“Should we be watching this?” Nie Mingjue asked, suddenly unsure.

Nie Huaisang rolled his eyes, “It’s just Wei-xiong making Wangji-xiong comfortable, Da-ge.”

“That’s the point, idiot,” Jiang Wanyin muttered exasperatedly.

Wei Wuxian bent down a bit to inspect the wounds and carefully laid Lan Wangji’s head onto the ground before standing up. He circled the cave a few times and, to his surprise, discovered a couple of shrubs.

“How the hell did that shrub survive in the cave?” Jin Zixuan inquired as if he felt compelled to point this out to everyone. “Without sunlight, water, and everything?”

Mianmian raised a brow at her friend and asked, “How is that even your biggest concern right now?”

“What? Shrubs shouldn't be growing inside a dark cave,” Jin Zixuan countered.

“A-Xuan,” Madam Jin sighed tiredly. “Just focus on the important matters first.”

“Right, sorry.”

Jin Ling and Jiang Yanli giggled at him.

Having finally found a few thicker, straighter branches, he returned to where he left Lan Wangji. Then, he rubbed the grime off the surface using the corner of his clothes and squatted before the Lan boy.

“What are you doing?” Lan Wangji demanded.

Lan Wangji's gaze remained fixed on his husband's exposed arm, and he immediately cleared his mind of all unholy thoughts. Wei Wuxian smirked at him anyway, knowing what he was thinking.

“Lan Zhan,” He whispered, leaning closer to his husband’s ears. “So shameless.”

Lan Zhan did not respond to him.

Once he’s done, Wei Wuxian glanced around, then asked, “Lan Zhan, do you have a rope or a ribbon?”

“Wei Wuxian, I swear—”

“You might, Jiang Cheng.”

“Oh, for fuck’s sake!”

“Hey, your forehead ribbon might do the trick. Come on, take it off.”

Scandalized, Lan Qiren exclaimed, “Wei Wuxian! Do not attempt to use the Lan ribbons for other purposes!”

‘You won't even ask your nephew what he does with that ribbon to me? He ties my wrists when we do our everyday!’ Wei Wuxian’s mind supplied, and he wanted to say it, but he can’t let the man go into qi deviation.

So instead, he responded, “I was just trying to help Lan Zhan’s leg! I'm not going to use it for anything else!”

‘Liar,’ Wei Wuxian's mind supplied once more, and he gave his husband a sidelong glance where he could see his husband's ears turning red and his eyes darkening, which vanished in an instant.

Qingheng-jun, Lan Xichen, and Lan Qiren did not know whether to laugh or cry.

Before Lan Wangji could respond, Wei Wuxian quickly reached out and took off his forehead ribbon.

The cultivators couldn’t help but stare in shock.

“How shameless!”

Wei Changze smacked his forehead while Cangse Sanren gaped. Although she’s also shameless (shaving Lan Qiren’s goatee was one of her biggest achievements), she is not so shameless as to pull Lan's forehead ribbon! It has its significance, and just picturing herself pulling Lan Qiren's forehead ribbon gave her major goosebumps. Lan Qiren would not have let her live the next day if she had done what her son did.

“Does he even know the meaning of the ribbon?” Madam Jin wondered in disbelief.

“I don’t think so,” Mianmian responded.

Lan Wangji jerked upright, his eyes wide as he reached for the end of his ribbon, "You..!"

"What do you mean 'me'?" Wei Wuxian asked. "Let's not worry about it. Given our current situation, no matter how much you like your ribbon, it can't be more important than losing your leg, can it?"

With a flick of his wrist, he used the forehead ribbon as a bandage, straightened up Lan Wangji's leg, and fixed it firmly onto the branch.

What Wei Wuxian did was inexcusable, but he had a point. In their situation, with them being injured, they have to use anything they can to help each other Qingheng-jun and Lan Xichen couldn't even fault Wei Wuxian because Lan Wangji needed immediate treatment, at least temporarily, until someone rescues them, and they were a bit grateful that Wei Wuxian found a way to help Lan Wangji's leg.

"I am sorry," Wei Wuxian said as he bowed to the Lan Family sheepishly and guiltily. "I had no other choice."

"It's fine," Qingheng-jun responded softly. "You are saving A-Zhan's life. We will be eternally grateful."

Wei Wuxian blushed and reluctantly nodded.

Lan Qiren, however, was torn between scolding Wei Wuxian and closing his mouth. Their ribbon is a sacred object to the Gusu Lan Clan, but using it as a bandage was unacceptable and disrespectful, and yet Wangji was suffering from a leg injury. Shouldn't he excuse Wei Wuxian's shameless act instead of getting mad at him?

"Wens," Jiang Fengmian muttered. "They're the absolute worst."

Seeing that his rage had no effect on Wei Wuxian, Lan Wangji leaned back, either too tired to sit up or simply angered speechless by his words.

“Ah yeah, here,” Wei Wuxian said as he took out a qiankun pouch. “Mianmian said the pouch is filled with medicinal herbs. See if there’s anything we can use.”

“How do you remember that, but not the meaning of the—“ Jiang Wanyin did not finish his sentence after remembering how awful and weird his brother’s mind works. “Forget it.”

“His memory is worse than I thought,” Jin Zixuan commented, and Wei Wuxian shot him a mild glare.

“Blame my mother for my terrible memory,” Wei Wuxian said as he crossed his arms.

“"How is my name brought up in this conversation?” Cangse Sanren wondered, half perplexed. “And why is my A-Ying blaming me?”

“It's because of that phrase you said to him when he was a child,” Lan Qiren unexpectedly interjected.

“Huh,” Cangse Sanren finally understood what he meant. “I suppose you’re right. My bad, A-Ying!”

Wei Wuxian poured the herbs into his hand and extended it to Lan Wangji, but the latter was still laying down, so he shook Lan Wangji's body and urged, “Lan Zhaaannn! Come on, sit straight! Don’t fall asleep on me!”

The heavy atmosphere of earlier had dissipated, and some could now properly smile; some even chuckled.

Jiang Yanli couldn't help but coo at the sight of her adorable A-Xian.

Wei Wuxian dragged Lan Wangji up, whining, “Wake up!”

Lan Wangji eventually sits up to shut Wei Wuxian up.

“These two are so cute,” a female cultivator remarked.

“I know right?”

Looking down at the herbs in Wei Wuxian's hands he pointed and explained, “This one stops blood flow, and this one removes poison in one’s blood.”

“Very impressive, Lan-er-gongzi,” Jiang Fengmian praised. Cultivators are required to study herbalism for emergency purposes in case a person does not have the necessary tools to heal their injuries. It is actually convenient, and only a few cultivators are knowledgeable about herbalism. It came as no surprise to Jiang Fengmian that Lan Wangji was one of them.

Lan Wangji bowed his head, “Thank you, Jiang-zongzhu.”

Wei Wuxian was relieved, “These two herbs huh? They’re really that useful?”

“Next time, bring a pouch full of herbs; I got it,” Zizhen noted with a nod.

“I can’t believe her perfume sachet turned out to be this helpful.”

“Thank you, Mianmian,” Wei Wuxian said, bowing to show his gratitude.

Mianmian immediately waved him off, embarrassed to see him bowing to her, and responded, “It’s alright. It’s nothing compared to how you saved me.”

“I’ll have to properly thank her when we get out.”

“Are you sure you do not mean to harass her properly?” Lan Wangji asked coldly.

For once, Jiang Wanyin agreed with him.

Wei Wuxian burst out laughing, while others gaped in bewilderment. Madam Lan cooed seeing her son pout (which is non-existent but she likes to think it’s there).

“I think I’m seeing things wrong.”

“No shit.”

“Is that jealous Hanguang-jun I see?”

“Yeah, he is really jealous!”

While the cultivators expressed their surprise at seeing a significant change in Lan Wangji's expression, Mianmian's face and Lan Wangji's ears turned red in embarrassment.

Wei Wuxian laughed as well, responding, “What are you talking about? It doesn’t count as harassing if I’m the one doing it. It only counts if the one doing it looks as greasy as Wen Chao.”

Remembering how ugly Wen Chao is and how he attempted to kiss Luo Qingyang, the cultivators shuddered, cringing.

Yep, he is absolutely right.

“Ugh, I don’t even want to remember.”

“As do I.”

“And harassing and flirting shamelessly are two different things,” Wei Wuxian couldn’t help but add, and Madam Jin and some other cultivators looked at him, unimpressed.

Although Wei Wuxian’s teasing was both okay and not okay, (with Lan Wangji's feelings and Wei Wuxian's never-ending teasing, it must've been torturous to watch the latter flirt with others. Not with men, but with women) it was preferable than his husband's way of flirting (it will not surprise her that the women her husband flirted will be announced as pregnant in a few days.)

Ugh, shameless, disgusting bastard...

After he had recovered from his laughter, Wei Wuxian's face became solemn. For a brief moment, he fixed his gaze on Lan Wangji.

“Okay, now strip.”

“What?!” everyone exclaimed, looking at the current Wei Wuxian, who is now gleefully laughing.

Lan Wangji frowned, “What?”

Without wasting any time, Wei Wuxian pushed Lan Wangji’s shoulders and slammed him (not too hard) to the ground.

“What do you think? Take your clothes off!”

“What the hell are you doing?!” Jiang Wanyin exclaimed, his face flushed red.

The disciples were no better; they were panicking and screaming their hearts out while covering their eyes and ears.

He did exactly what he said. Hands grabbing each of Lan Wangji’s lapels, he peeled them to the side, revealing a muscular chest and shoulders as white as snow.

“What kind of fuckery is this?!”

“Are we watching porn between men now?!”

“Woah, woah, calm down! I’m sure they’re not gonna do it!”

“Wei Ying!” Lan Wangji exclaimed, his face flushed in embarrassment. “What do you want to do?!”

“What do I want to do?” Wei Wuxian smiled as he took off all of his clothes and tore them to shreds. “Right now, we are the only ones here. I’m already making it so obvious —what do you think I want to do?”

The cultivators shrieked even louder, covering their faces in embarrassment.

“You!” Lan Qiren accuses, pointing to Wei Wuxian. “Why are you harassing my nep—”

“I swear I’m not!” Wei Wuxian protested, raising his hands in surrender. “I am helping him!”

“What we’re seeing right now is you stripping Lan-er-gongzi,” Cangse Sanren smirked. “Wei Ying, you're my son, but you're really bold and shameless.”

As he finished, he stood up and drew away his belt sash. As though reciprocating out of courtesy, he revealed his own chest as well.

While there were loud discussions and screams around the temple, the female cultivators smiled, saying, “Oh my.”

“That's it; I'm done with this shit,” Jiang Wanyin said before turning around and walking away.

“Jiang-xiong, you can’t leave yet,” Nie Huaisang said with a smile. “We haven’t seen the best part yet.”

“I ain't seeing them go at it!” Jiang Wanyin exclaimed.

“We haven’t done anything!” Wei Wuxian interjected once more.

“You,” Jiang Wanyin glared at him. “Shut up!”

With deep-set collarbones, the lines of his torso flowed smoothly. Although it almost flaunted its adolescence, it was full of youthful energy and strength.

“Ugh, why are we seeing this again?” an old cultivator grumbled. “It would have been preferable if it had been a man and a woman.”

“Right, it would have been entertaining to watch.”

Jiang Wanyin glared at the men. As much as it disgusts him to see his brother go at it with his husband, he loves him, and he will not tolerate this kind of man.

“Between a man and a woman, or between two men, witnessing this kind of sexual tension, don’t be surprised; you’ll get a hard-on later,” Wei Wuxian responded, his face darkening. So what if they think it’s not as enjoyable as a man or a woman doing it? He and Lan Zhan pleasure themselves really well, and if someone happened to walk in on them doing it, it wouldn't matter if they were both men; people would be turned on seeing such a scene before them.

“I'd like to see how your entire body reacts to seeing me and Lan Zhan do it,” Wei Wuxian said, his smile reminiscent of Yiling Laozu's. “I’ll expect great feedback from all of you.”

Lan Wangji felt his heart soar with pride as the men scowled in anger.

“Uhh, Wei Wuxian,” Jin Zixuan piped in. “As much as you want them to see you and Lan Zhan doing it, please leave us out of it.”

Wei Wuxian shrugged, “Sure.”

Some of them could finally breathe properly….yet.

Watching his movements, Lan Wangji’s complexion switched between pale, dark, and flustered. His blood seemed to boil to the point of having to burst out from between his lips. Right in front of Lan Wangji’s face, he took off his own drenched coat. He raised it up with one hand before releasing his grip, letting it fall to the ground.

‘What a tease!’ All cultivators thought simultaneously.

Wei Wuxian then smiled and leaned forward, his hands resting on either side of Lan Wangji's head.

"Now that the shirts are gone, it's time for the trousers."

"You told us this is child-friendly?!" Nie Mingjue burst out, his face flushed as he stared at the immortal, who seemed unaffected by all this blatant display.

"It is," Baoshan Sanren deadpanned. "All of you are making this an issue. You'll understand why Wei Wuxian is acting this way."

"You—" Lan Wangji began, only to be cut off abruptly when he began coughing violently. Seconds later, a mouthful of blackish blood escaped his lungs and splattered across the filthy floor.

"Alright, the bad blood is out. No need to thank me!" Wei Wuxian said, tapping a few acupuncture points on Lan Wangji's chest.

"…."

"Huh?"

"What?"

"Wait, so what he did—"

"That was just to—"

"To make the blood—"

“I told you so!” Wei Wuxian scoffed.

Burning with embarrassment, Jin Ling shouted, “What is wrong with that brain of yours?! There could've been a thousand ways to make him cough out the blood, but you just started stripping him!”

“I had to force him to cough up the blood because he didn't seem to want to cough it up anytime,” Wei Wuxian countered. “And in order to do that, I need to scare him.”

Ugh, Sizhui will never see his parents the same way again.

“T-That was expertly done,” Xiao Xingchen commented, nervously chuckling. He'd never seen anyone act like that before. It was both terrifying and exciting. Were they serious about Wei Wuxian not having a lover before?

On the other hand, Wei Wuxian continued to apologize to the Lan Family because they definitely did not expect that to happen even if it was done to help Lan Zhan, but it made him feel worse that Madam Lan and Qingheng-jun only nodded at him without saying anything. It would’ve made him better if they had chastised him. Although he could feel Lan Qiren’s rage from behind, his eyes were stabbing daggers into his back.

“Wei Ying, please choose your words properly in the future,” Jiang Fengmian said, recalling how he asked Lan Wangji what he wanted.

“I will, Jiang-zongzhu.”

“Wei Ying,” Wei Changze finally processed what had happened. “Don’t do that again, alright?”

Nodding, Wei Wuxian lowly responded, “Yes, father.”

After the mouthful of blackish blood had been spat out, Lan Wangji immediately felt the pain and irritation within his chest lift away. Looking back on what Wei Wuxian did, he finally realized and hurriedly pulled his robes back on.

Although Lan Wangji knew that it was out of good will, he still seemed a bit annoyed, "….Can you not make this kind of joke again?!"

Some began to feel sorry for the second jade, but at least Wei Wuxian helped him in spitting out the blood, right?

Jiang Yanli exhaled a sigh. Perhaps her A-Xian should stop teasing people like this in order to avoid hurting them.

"It's very unhealthy for blood like that to be held in," Wei Wuxian protested. "It gets out with just a scare, though."

Then, the cultivators were brought back to the Dusk-creek Mountain. As they climbed Wei Wuxian noticed that Lan Wangji was looking worse than usual. It must've been that an energy of gloom had collected within his chest, so he purposely tried to scare and provoke him in order for him to let out the blood that he had been holding in.

"Don't worry—I don't like men, I won't take advantage of the opportunity and do anything to you."

The cultivators gave Wei Wuxian an unimpressed look, *'Really Wei Wuxian?'*

"At the time, I don't know if it was possible to like men like that," Wei Wuxian protested, pouting. They don't need to remind him of how stupid he was in the past.

"So oblivious," Wen Qing mumbled in amusement.

“Ridiculous!” Lan Wangji exclaimed, his annoyance growing.

Lan Wangji’s temper was especially bad today, so Wei Wuxian did not protest any further and waved his hand, “Okay, okay. Ridiculous it is. I’m ridiculous. I’m the most ridiculous there is.”

“Yes.”

“No.”

Cangse Sanren and Lan Qiren said simultaneously and glared at each other.

As he spoke, the cold, underground air climbed up his spine, causing him to shudder. He immediately stood up, gathered a pile of dead leaves and branches, and drew the fire talisman on his palm once more.

The leaves and branches crunched into flames, letting off a few sparks once in a while. Then, Wei Wuxian ground up the herbs that were picked out earlier and rip Lan Wangji’s trouser leg open. He then sprinkled them evenly over the three hideous holes that had just barely ceased to bleed.

The sight made the cultivators cringe and disgusted.

This Wei Wuxian was nothing like the previous Wei Wuxian. All of his teasing and shamelessness vanished the moment he set his gaze on Lan Wangji's leg. He is gentle, and he moves with care when tending to Lan Wangji’s injury, which makes Lan Xichen smile.

Despite the fact that Wei Wuxian is a flirt and a troublemaker, he knows when to put his playful personality aside when certain matters require his attention.

Lan Wangji silently watched as Wei Wuxian applied the herbs, his eyes stuck on Wei Wuxian's chest.

Right, Wei Wuxian was injured as well.

Then, Lan Wangji raised his arm, abruptly stopping Wei Wuxian.

"What's wrong?" Wei Wuxian asked.

Without speaking a word, Lan Wangji took out some of the herbs from his palm and pressed them onto Wei Wuxian's chest.

Wei Wuxian's entire body trembled as he exclaimed, "Ah!"

That was really sweet of Lan Wangji.

"Thank you, Lan-er-gongzi," Wei Changze said, bowing slightly.

Bowing in return, Lan Wangji responded, "No worri—"

"Call me, father," Wei Changze grinned, and Wei Wuxian laughed delightedly seeing how his husband's ears turned red.

"Call me mother too," Cangse Sanren piped in.

And Lan Wangji, despite his embarrassment, is obedient; he nodded stiffly.

“Mother…..Father.”

Qingheng-jun and Madam Lan cooed at their son’s flustered expression. On the other hand, Wei Changze nodded in satisfaction, while Cangse Sanren squealed in delight, “Ah, so cute!”

“Looks like my parents like you more than I do,” Wei Wuxian said, leaning closer to his husband's ears.

Wei Wuxian had almost forgotten that there was a fresh wound on himself as well, created by the iron. It was also still bleeding and had also been soaked in the water.

Lan Wangji took his hand away. Wei Wuxian hissed a few times before peeling away the herbs that had been pressed against his chest, tossing them into Lan Wangji's leg once more.

“What are you doing?!” Wen Qing demanded. “You need the medicine just as much as Lan Wangji!”

Jiang Wanyin rolled his eyes, “He’s an idiot, really.”

“Don’t mind me,” Wei Wuxian reassured him. “I get hurt a lot, and I play in Lotus Lake as usual even when I’m hurt. I got used to it a long time ago.”

The implication of Wei Wuxian’s words was obvious, and Cangse Sanren and Wei Changze couldn’t help but throw a dark glance at the Jiang Matriarch and Patriarch.

Not only did Cangse Sanren and Wei Changze notice, but so did some cultivators. They were becoming wary of the Jiang's treatment of others.

Yu Ziyuan is well aware that she is being scrutinized, but she did not care. After all, what Wei Wuxian said is true. Who wouldn’t get hurt if you’re a troublemaker?

“How many herbs can there be inside a small perfume sachet? There isn’t enough to begin with. I think those three holes of yours need them more—what’s with that look? I’m fine, Lan Zhan. I told you I’m used to it.”

“You obviously aren't fine,” Nie Huaisang mumbled lowly, hiding half his face behind his fan before catching a glimpse of the Jiang Matriarch's expression. She’s annoyed.

‘The audacity to feel annoyed!’

“What can you say about this, Jiang-zongzhu?” Nie Mingjue asked, turning around to face Jiang Fengmian with an expression one cannot decipher.

“I…”

What can Jiang Fengmian say at this point? From previous scenes, it was clear that Wei Wuxian was not being treated fairly in Lotus Pier. Worse, he did nothing to stop his wife.

“It was said that he got hurt often in Lotus Pier, and it was implied he got hurt not from playing but from something else,” Nie Mingjue’s expression darkened. He may have harbored hate for Wei Wuxian, but he is intolerant of anything that deviates from the moral good.

Facing the previous Nie Sect Leader, Yu Ziyuan scowled, “Speak clearly, Nie Mingjue.”

“You abused him to the point where he became accustomed to it, increasing his pain tolerance and causing him to care little for his own health. Jiang Sect is a formidable sect, but I am beginning to understand why some cultivators refuse to give you the respect that you deserve.”

The disciples are now gaping, seeing The Nie Mingjue once again defend their Senior Wei.

Yu Ziyuan’s lips quirk up, “I forgot how strong your sense of justice was, Nie Mingjue. Where did this come from? As far as I know, you don’t seem fond of Wei Wuxian either.”

And yes, she is right; he does not like him.

“I will not deny that, but I will not tolerate any abusive treatment I witness.”

Now Yu Ziyuan’s smirk faded quickly, “What gives you the right to meddle in Jiang Sect's business? I punish him as I see fit for every problem he caused. I suppose that’s not abusive as you think. I am merely disciplining—”

“Don’t talk about discipline in front of me or in front of the Lans. You punish him for the smallest things,” Wei Changze piped in, standing beside Nie Mingjue with a look enough to kill.

“Even the smallest problems can destroy the reputation of the sect,” Yu Ziyuan countered, refusing to back down.

“A-Niang, stop!” Jiang Yanli exclaimed, her eyes wide with disbelief. Didn’t her mother say she'd try to be better? Why is she not trying? “Do not say anymore!”

Before Yu Ziyuan could respond, she was once again silenced, not by Qingheng-jun, but by Lan Wangji, who is looking at her coldly. His stare was clear enough to convey his malice toward her, making her even angrier. Jiang Wanyin was no better; he looked both tired and frustrated.

Jiang Fengmian will need to speak with his wife again.

Cangse Sanren and Wei Changze bowed at Nie Mingjue to express their gratitude, and Nie Mingjue feels guilty for receiving such a kind gesture. Soon, this couple would also take their

gratitude back.

“If you know that it hurts, do not be so rash next time,” Lan Wangji advised, his face dark. “You won’t be able to get rid of that thing now, even if you spent a lifetime trying.”

“You pushed Wei Wuxian out of the way and nearly died!” Madam Lan yelled, enraged at her son's carelessness. “You have no room to talk!”

Lan Xichen would have laughed if the situation wasn't so serious.

Wei Wuxian easily dismissed the concern as he shrugged slightly, “I mean, I didn't have much of a choice, right?" Do you think I enjoy being burned? Who would have guessed Wang Lingjiao is so heartless? She nearly pressed the iron against her eye. More importantly, Mianmian is a girl, and quite a pretty girl at that. If she went blind in one eye or something got on her face, it wouldn't come off for the rest of her life. How bad could it get?”

‘That doesn’t mean you get burned in return,’ Sizhui thought. He understood his Xian-gege, but he didn't like how the Wen Sect seal was branded on his chest; it felt wrong.

“You still need to be careful, idiot,” Jin Ling muttered.

“You sound like Jiang Cheng just now, A-Ling!” Wei Wuxian beamed, and Jin Ling’s cheeks turned red.

“Shut up!”

“The thing on your body right now will not be able to come off for the rest of your life either,” Lan Wangji said in a thin voice.

“That’s different. It’s not on the face, and I’m a man—what am I scared of? In a man’s life, how can one not get a few wounds and earn a few scars?”

His upper body bare, he was squatting on the ground as he picked up a branch and poked at the flames to make them burn brighter, adding, “And if you think from another perspective, even though this won’t be able to come off, it represents the fact that I protected a maiden from harm!”

“Uhh, Wei Wuxian,” Jin Zixuan muttered, feeling a chill sweep through his temple. Then, as if he realized where the cold air came from, he shuddered. Even as a young man, Lan Wangji is still terrifying! “You should stop talking—”

“And the maiden will definitely remember me after this. She won’t be able to forget me for the rest of her life.”

Lan Wangji forced himself to calm down.

“Stop talking, Wei Wuxian!” yelled Mianmian, embarrassed and terrified for her and his life.

“And I won’t forget this for the rest of my life.”

Wei Wuxian wanted to smack his younger self. Why is he talking like he's got a crush? No wonder Lan Zhan bit him after.

“Now that I think about it, it’s actually quite—”

Wei Wuxian had barely finished his sentence when Lan Wangji shoved him hard to the ground, raging, “So you also know that she will not be able to forget you for the rest of her life!!”

The cultivators couldn't decide whether to laugh or cry. Though some snorted and sighed tiredly.

“Hanguang-jun sure drank a lot of vinegar.”

“Look at him getting mad!”

“Honestly, I don’t blame Hanguang-jun for getting jealous. Wei Wuxian’s words were a bit..”

Collapsed on the ground, he broke into a cold sweat from the pain, moaning with his neck stretched forward, “Lan Zhan, you… Have I done something to you?!”

Lan Wangji clenched his fists, “You shouldn’t tease people like that if you don’t mean what you say. You doing whatever you please will leave people in turmoil!”

For a brief moment, Wei Wuxian was perplexed. “It’s not like I was flirting with you, so why would you be upset?”

“That’s the point!” The cultivators chorused. “He's envious that you aren't flirting with him!”

‘You don’t have to say it again!’ Wei Wuxian thought as he crossed his arms. *‘I know I was stupid as fuck!’*

Wei Wuxian then smiled, “Unless..”

“Unless what?” Lan Wangji asked harshly.

“Unless you like Mianmian!”

A loud smack echoed throughout the room as multiple people face-palmed simultaneously. Mianmian, on the other hand, snorted because there was no way in hell the second Jade likes her, and she doesn't like him. She only considered him as a friend.

Jiang Wanyin groaned, “Wei Wuxian, you’re a genius, but what the fuck?”

Lan Wangji understands them. It's hard to watch knowing that the person you like is an idiot who believes you like someone else. But the cultivators can't blame Wei Wuxian for thinking that, can they? Lan Wangji constantly acts as if he despises him. Why else would he believe the second Jade has feelings for him?

Jiang Yanli chuckled, “So close, but painfully so far.”

“Please do not speak nonsense,” Lan Wangji responded in a cold voice.

Wei Wuxian laughed, “Alright, then, I’ll speak one-sense.”

Jingyi and the other disciples couldn’t help but laugh. Their Senior Wei really has a great sense of humor.

Lan Wangji then asked, “Is it amusing, trifling with empty words?”

“It’s very amusing,” Wei Wuxian said with a grin. “But believe me, my words are as insignificant as my moves, which is to say, none at all!”

Jiang Wanyin and Wen Qing rolled their eyes.

Lan Wangji sighed and muttered to himself, “Why am I sitting here having such a useless conversation with you?”

Somehow, Wei Wuxian had moved beside him again and sat down, speaking without a care for the consequences, "Because there's no other choice. We're the only two unfortunate souls left here, aren't we? If you don't have useless conversations with me, then who will you have them with?"

"I'd rather talk to the wall, than converse with nonsense with someone," Jin Ling remarked, and Wei Wuxian clutched his chest as if he were in pain.

"A-Ling! You'd rather bore yourself than talk to me? How cruel!"

"A-Ling, remember when you entered the stone castle and got trapped within the—"

"Stop!" Jin Ling shivered. He does not like want to remember that again. That feeling of being trapped in a closed space with no air to breathe and corpses of people he does not know surrounding him, he does not want to experience that again!

"Stone castle?" Nie Mingjue demanded angrily, turning to face Jingyi and Nie Huaisang, who shrieked and two hid behind Sizhui.

"Trapped?" Jiang Yanli also asked.

"That's for everyone to know later!" Sizhui hastily responded, pressured by their stares.

Lan Wangji glanced at him, who seemed to forget all of his past pain as soon as the wounds had healed. Just as Wei Wuxian was about to give him a large grin, he saw Lan Wangji lower his head.

And then…

“Ahhhhhhhhhh!!! Stop, stop, stop!!!!!”

Lan Wangji had bitten him!

The cultivators were taken aback and gasped.

“Hanguang-jun is biting Senior Wei’s arm!!”

Lan Wangji wanted the earth to eat him whole right now, while Wei Wuxian burst out laughing.

“Wangji?!” Lan Qiren and Qing Heng-jun shrieked at the same time, perplexed and shocked by his unusual behavior.

“Ah,” Lan Xichen muttered, having realized something. “It seems Wangji also wanted to leave his own mark on Wei-gongzi’s body as well.”

“Bites don’t last long, right?” Nie Huaisang asked, a mischievous glint in his eyes. “So it will fade eventually.”

“Well, it stays on the skin temporarily at least,” Jiang Yanli responded instead.

Of course, Wei Wuxian had just realized this as well. He thought Lan Zhan was annoyed with him, so he bit him to silence him, but of course, it was the opposite. His husband is really full of surprises.

Wei Wuxian gazed adoringly at his husband and said, “Love you, Lan Zhan.”

Despite his embarrassment, Lan Wangji responded softly, “Love Wei Ying, too.”

Wei Wuxian continued wailing while Lan Wangji sunk his teeth deeper.

“Are you gonna stop?! If you don't, I'll kick you! Don't think I won't kick you just because you're injured!”

Lan Wangji did not stop.

“Stop biting! Stop biting! I’ll go away! I’ll go away if you stop, I’ll go away!! Ughh! Lan Zhan, you’re mad today!! You’re a dog! Stop biting!!!”

With the dog comment, they were reminded once again how much Wei Wuxian despises them.

Lan Wangji’s face morphed into horror. How could he bite Wei Ying so viciously? If only he'd known... But it was his jealousy that compelled him to act before he could think. He will make amends. He forced his gaze on his husband and noticed his seductive smile.

‘Ah…’

His ears turned red, and he averted his gaze.

“Dogs are cute, you know?” Jin Zixuan commented as if it was necessary.

“Yes, I agree with Father!” Jin Ling piped in.

“That doesn't mean they're liked by everyone,” Wei Wuxian replied, sticking his tongue out at Jin Zixuan and Jin Ling.

When Lan Wangji had finished his fit and felt satisfied, Wei Wuxian sprang up and scrambled to the other side of the cave, "Don't come over!"

"Poor, Wei-xiong," Nie Huaisang murmured.

"That bite must've been painful."

"Look at his arm!"

The female cultivators started whispering to each other, and Lan Wangji did not waste his time, saying, "I'm sorry, Wei Ying."

"No sorry's between us, right? And besides..." Wei Wuxian embraced his husband before whispering, "You always bite me every night; what's the point of saying sorry now?"

Wei Wuxian felt satisfied as the hand holding his waist tightened.

Complying with Wei Wuxian's request, Lan Wangji straightened his back slowly. Fixing his hair and his clothes, he spoke nothing, eyes looking down calmly. Wei Wuxian was then left to wonder if it had been someone who shoved him and sunk his teeth into his arm.

"You sure no spirit entered Lan Wangji earlier?" Song Lan asked. "It's amazing how quickly he can revert to his indifferent self."

'The spirit would have left his body before they could enter,' Zizhen thought.

"Love can make us do crazy things, they said," Madam Jin responded bitterly.

Wei Wuxian glanced at the bite marks on his arm and squatted down, still shaken. Curled up in the corner, he continued to poke at the flames, not at all comprehending the situation.

'How could Lan Zhan do this? Even though he saved me, you can say that I saved him as well, didn't I? It's not that I want him to thank me or anything, but why is it that we still can't be friends, even after so much has happened? Don't tell me that... that I'm really as annoying as Jiang Cheng makes it to be?!'

Jiang Wanyin flinched, and the other disciples shook their heads, expressing their disagreements. It was obvious that Wei Wuxian had a large number of friends. May it be a man or woman, they easily got along with him, but on the other hand, Lan Wangji was the only complicated one.

Madam Lan and Cangse Sanren both sighed. There has already been a misunderstanding between the two; they do not need to see more of it. Though, as mentioned earlier, they really can't blame Wei Wuxian for thinking that way because, after every interaction, Lan Wangji pushes him away, and now he has bitten him.

Wei Wuxian senses that Lan Wangji will apologize, so he covered his mouth immediately.

"You can't say sorry now."

Lan Wangji removed his hand and said, rather than apologizing, he said, "Wei Ying is not annoying. He must know that."

Wei Wuxian smiled fondly, "I know."

Just as Wei Wuxian was starting to doubt himself, Lan Wangji spoke, "Thank you."

Wei Wuxian thought he had heard wrong, so he looked at Lan Wangji, who was also looking at him. Then, in all seriousness, Lan Wangji repeated himself, "Thank you."

The female cultivators nearly squealed.

Seeing how he lowered his head slightly, Wei WuXian was scared that he might worship him by kneeling. He quickly darted to the side.

“There's no need, there's no need,” he hastily reassured. “There's a problem with me that I'm unable to stand it when others thank me, especially when people like you thank me so seriously. It's so creepy that I'm even getting goosebumps. Kneeling worship, of course, is even more so unnecessary.”

It was humbling to see. Normally, cultivators would feel pride when someone thanked them or kowtowed before them, but Wei Wuxian was the polar opposite.

Cangse Sanren and Wei Changze were happy that even without their guidance, their son had grown up to be a humble man.

“You are thinking too much.” Lan Wangji replied with indifference. “Even if I wanted to worship you, I would not be able to move.”

It seemed that he was finally back to normal, and he even thanked Wei Wuxian two times. Wei Wuxian was so delighted that he couldn't help but want to move over again. He was the type of person who loved to be shoulder-to-shoulder with others, but the slight pain from the bite marks on his arm reminded him that Lan Zhan had just thrown a fit a moment ago, and maybe he'd be at it again just a moment later.

Zizhen chuckled, “Better distance yourself, Senior Wei.”

“He’s Wei Wuxian,” Jin Ling interjected. “If you tell him to stay away, he'll cling even more.”

Wei Wuxian fake cries, “Is that what you think of me, A-Ling?”

“You cling to me even when I tell you to stay away.”

“That’s because I love my favorite nephew!”

“I am your only nephew!” Jin Ling scowled, both delighted and flustered by his response. “And gross!”

Jiang Yanli giggled at the two.

Wei Wuxian then regained control of himself and stared at the cave's black ceiling, speaking calmly, “Now that Jiang Cheng and the others have escaped, it'll take them one or two days to go down the mountain. Once down, they'll definitely return to wherever they live rather than reporting to the Wen Sect. But, since their swords were taken, I'm not sure how long it would take them to find assistance. I'd say we'll have to stay here underground for quite some time. We'd need to search for ways to solve a few issues.”

The cultivators nodded along with Wei Wuxian, impressed by his analysis and how realistic he remained despite the desperate situation. If the other disciples were trapped there, they'd probably panic about their hopeless situation.

“Ugh, that stupid Su She is to blame for everything!” Jingyi scowled.

Sizhui nodded, “Xian-gege and Hanguang-jun would’ve been safe with the rest by now.”

“Sect Leader Jiang and the others were ambushed by the Wens remember?” A Nie disciple asked. “They're probably fighting or trying to escape from them now.”

The adults clenched their fists and jaws in response to what the Nie disciple said.

After a pause, he continued, “The good thing is that the monster stays in the pool and doesn't chase after us. The disadvantage is that it does not come out. With it guarding the hole under the pool, we won't be able to get out either.”

“It is perhaps not a monster,” Lan Wangji disagreed.

“What does that mean?” A Jiang disciple inquired; however, the memory might explain it later, so he returned his attention to the screen.

“What does it look like, to you?" Lan Wangji asked.

“A tortoise,” Wei Wuxian responded.

Lan Wangji then proceeds to say, “There is one divine creature that takes on such a form”

“The divine beast Xuanwu?”

According to the books they've all read, the Xuanwu, also known as the Nether Xuanwu, was a hybrid of a turtle and a snake. It was a water deity that dwelled in the North Sea. Since the Nether was also in the North, the creature was known as the God of the Northern Sky.

Lan Wangji nodded, and Wei Wuxian frowned even more, “How can a divine beast look like this? It’s got a mouthful of fangs and eats human flesh. It seems a bit too different from the legends.”

“Of course it is not a proper Divine Xuanwu. Rather, it is a semi-completed result of failing to rise to divinity and being transformed into a yao. In other words, it is a deformed Divine Xuanwu.”

“Deformed?”

The disciples wondered the same thing, suddenly were intrigued by this killing machine beast, and began taking notes for future reference (Just in case Lan Qiren might conduct a surprise quiz after this memory is done).

Lan Wangji nodded once again, “I have read of it in an ancient text. Four hundred years ago, a ‘fake Xuanwu’ appeared and rampaged amid Qishan. It was large in size and consumed live humans. One cultivator named it the ‘Xuanwu of Slaughter’.”

“So the creature that Wen Chao led us to hunt is a four-hundred-year-old beast-the Xuanwu of Slaughter?” Wei Wuxian inquired.

“Its size appears larger than what is recorded in the text, but it should be the one,” Lan Wangji answered.

Because of this, Nie Mingjue and Lan Qiren fumed. So this was the potential Xuanwu of Slaughter from four hundred years ago?! And Wen Chao just led them there casually as if they could defeat a beast that large and powered by hundreds of years of Yao energy like that?! What was Wen Chao thinking? What was Wen Ruohan thinking?!

Wei Wuxian raised a brow, “It's been four hundred years already, so of course it has grown. Hadn't the Xuanwu of Slaughter been killed back then?”

“No,” Lan Wangji responded. “A few cultivators had joined the alliance and prepared to kill it, but on one winter day that year, there happened to be heavy snowfall, and the weather was unusually cold. Then, the Xuanwu of Slaughter disappeared and was never seen again.”

Wei Wuxian widened his eyes as realization struck him, “It was hibernating.”

Now there is no doubt that that was the Xuanwu of Slaughter from 400 years ago.

Jiang Yanli clenched her fists in worry.

After a pause, Wei Wuxian added, “But even if it was hibernating, it didn't need to sleep for four hundred years, did it? You said that the Xuanwu of Slaughter eats live humans —just how many has it eaten?”

“No doubt it consumed thousands,” A-Qing said, her face morphing into worry. She can’t imagine such a beast still being alive to this day.

“The book records that back then, whenever it appeared, the number of humans consumed ranged from hundreds to entire villages and cities. From the handful of times when it rampaged, it consumed at least five thousand alive,” Lan Wangji explained.

“Oh, so it overate," Wei Wuxian mumbled.

Based on what they've seen so far, the beast appears to enjoy taking an entire person into its shell, possibly to savor them slowly. It was possible that it had hoarded too much food in its shell at once four hundred years ago, and that it still hadn't digested everything.

“Oh god,” a female cultivator looked at the screen. “It shouldn't take long for help to arrive, right?”

“Without swords, it can take them days to arrive at their respective homes,” her friend answered solemnly.

Lan Wangji didn't acknowledge him, so Wei Wuxian continued, “Speaking of eating, have you practiced inedia? Those like us can probably last three to four days without eating or drinking. But if after a few days, nobody comes to save us, our energy, strength, and spiritual power will probably start to drop.”

Jiang Wanyin's mood was exacerbated by the fact that help arrived seven days later. He did try his hardest to run to his home to alert his father. He had sustained injuries after the Wens ambushed them, but he refused to give up. It hurt, but he was more concerned about his brother. What would've happened if he succumbed to his injuries? To his brother and Lan Wangji?

He does not want to know.

Wei Wuxian took back the branch and sketched out a map on the ground, linking a few places together, "From Dusk-Creek Mountain to Gusu is a bit shorter than from Dusk-Creek Mountain to Yunmeng. It's probably your sect's people who will come first. Let's just be patient. Even if they don't come, the most that we'll have to wait is one or two days before Jiang Cheng arrives at Lotus Pier. Jiang Cheng is quite clever. The Wen Sect's people won't stop him. There's nothing to worry—"

"They will not come," Lan Wangji interjected, his eyes downcast and he appeared more tired than usual.

Lan Qiren was about to ask why when he suddenly remembered.

Cloud Recesses had been burnt down.

Wei Wuxian frowned a bit, "What do you mean?"

"The Cloud Recesses has been burnt down already."

Despite knowing and witnessing this, the reminder broke the crowd further. Without Gusu Lan's assistance, the Jiangs were their only hope.

Qingheng-jun cursed himself for being so weak. What kind of sect leader, such as himself, would fail to protect his own clan and children from the Wens?

“Qingheng-jun,” Madam Lan called out, and the man snapped out of his reverie and turned to face his wife. “A-Zhan will be okay. He will be rescued.”

“Of course he will,” he said despite not knowing the future events.

Wei Wuxian was hesitant, afraid of crossing the line, but he also wanted to know, “Is everyone still there? Your father, your brother?”

He had thought that even if the leader of the Lan Sect, Lan Wangji's father, was heavily injured, Lan Qiren and Lan Xichen would probably still be there to take control of the situation.

Wei Wuxian turned around amid the muddle and he felt his entire body become paralyzed. The glow of the firelight reflected against Lan Wangji's face as though he was made of warm jade. It illuminated, with utmost clarity, the tear streaks that ran down his cheek, as well.

“Father is almost gone. Brother is missing.”

The indifferent, unmovable Hanguang-jun's cry broke the hearts of the crowd. Even when crying he truly looked beautiful, but at the moment, he did not resemble a jade statue, he looked human, vulnerable, and broken. He most likely learned of this news while already at Qishan and had no time to worry about his brother or mourn his father's death. It was at this moment that perhaps it was already too much for him to handle, so he just let it all out. Despite his reputation for being cold and aloof, in front of Wei Wuxian, he did not bother to care anymore.

The Lan Family came close to Lan Wangji, and he turned to face his father. His father smiled sadly, and perhaps he wanted to cry right now, seeing as his father is clearly alive and well, smiling at him and tapping his shoulder for comfort. His father may not have been by his side, and he may be a stranger to him, but he is still an important person in his life, so Lan Wangji closed the gap and embraced him.

To say Qingheng-jun was taken aback would be an understatement. Qingheng-jun returned the embrace, this time more tightly, and Lan Wangji didn't mind the tightness. For him, it felt right; he felt warm. Qingheng-jun smiled, tears welling up in the corners of his eyes, but he refused to cry.

Lan Xichen and Madam Lan stayed close to them. Wei Wuxian smiled, feeling happy for his husband.

No one ruined the moment; it was both precious and sad. To be able to hug your father despite them not by your side for your whole life is priceless. To finally be able to let go of all your doubts and simply be free.

Lan Qiren, on the other hand, was conflicted. He didn't want his nephews to be close to his brother and their mother, but it appears that this is unavoidable. After all, they are their parents. He cannot project his anger toward his brother and their mother toward his nephews.

Once Lan Wangji let go of his father, Qingheng-jun smiled. It felt good, and admittedly he did not want to stop hugging his son.

Lan Wangji then saluted, “I apologize for being this emotional.”

“Wangji, you cannot apologize for being emotional; it is normal,” Qingheng-jun responded.

Lan Wangji nodded and turned to face his mother and brother, who embraced him as well. With a light heart, he returned to his husband's side.

Wei WuXian was stunned and speechless. He didn't know what to do, so he turned his head the other way. A while later, he spoke, “Um, Lan Zhan.”

“Shut up,” Lan Wangji responded with coldness.

Wei Wuxian shut up.

Tears continued to fall down Lan Wangji's face. Whereas most people would turn red-faced and sniffle as they sobbed, and where most people would wail loudly to let others know how they felt, Lan Wangji sobbed with no sound at all.

Silence is cold, chilling, and convulsive. It is the most powerful scream. Tears are powerful, poignant, and piercing, but silent crying is more of a suffering. A suffering made more intense by each passing moment.

This was kind of painful to watch. Some cultivators clutched their chests and failed to hold back their tears. No doubt there were more painful memories they're going to see soon.

On the other hand, Jiang Wanyin can relate to Lan Wangji. Losing a loved one was the worst feeling he'd ever experienced. It felt like his will to live vanished the moment he saw his parents' corpses before him. Although their coping mechanism was vastly different. He vented out all of his anger and frustrations, even choking his own brother, but Lan Wangji bottled up all of his emotions before exploding, weeping, and hurting silently. He witnessed that after his brother died.

The fire cracked.

Lan Wangli spoke quietly, "Wei Ying, you really are an awful person."

"Oh..."

And it's sad that Lan Wangji probably did not mean that, but Wei Wuxian believed him, causing more misunderstanding between them.

Sizhui wanted to walk over to Lan Wangji and just stay there, but he was hesitant, so he just remained in his seat.

Turning to look at the ground, he thought to himself, *'With so many things that have happened to him, Lan Zhan's mood is at its worst right now, but there's still me flashing around his sight. So that's why he's so angry. He didn't have the energy to hit me because his leg is hurt, so he could only bite me... I guess I should leave him some peace and quiet.'*

'It thoughtful of Wei Wuxian to give Lan Wangji some space to mourn,' Madam Jin observed. *'Lan Wangji deserved to let out all of his emotions.'*

"Three days."

"What?" Wei Wuxian asked and glanced over, stunned that the second jade spoke.

Taking a deep breath, Lan Wangji wiped his tears away and continued, "Rest for three days. If no one comes to help us..."

Wei Wuxian agreed and added, "Then we'll kill that bastard monster."

Then the memory faded into darkness.

Everyone thought the memory had finished, but it seems that they were wrong.

A moment later, the memory continued. In an unknown dark canyon, Jiang Wanyin and a group of Jiang disciples traveled desperately, the majority of them leaning on each other for support while Jiang Wanyin supported himself with a walking stick.

Jiang Fengmian and Yu Ziyuan both jerked back at the sight. Jiang Fengmian was relieved that his son and disciples had escaped; however, Yu Ziyuan appeared to feel differently.

She really wants Wen Chao, right here right now, just so she could torture him for hurting her son.

Jiang Yanli unconsciously took her younger brother's hand in hers. She really can’t stand seeing her brother like this.

***‘Wei Wuxian, you’d better hold on,’* Jiang Wanyin thought.**

“Worry about yourself first!” Wei Wuxian and Yu Ziyuan simultaneously exclaimed.

God, Jin Ling frequently goes night hunting in other places but he’s never been to this canyon before. This canyon could be miles from Lotus Pier! And his injured uncle walked all the way there?! He’d probably arrived there more than three days!

Jin Ling looked at his uncle, whose face was solemn and intent on the memory.

The memory then returned to the cave, and, as if the time was speeding up, Wei Wuxian and Lan Wangji moved around doing their individual work.

The two waited for an entire three days.

“And you weren’t back yet?!” Jin Ling enquired helplessly. His prediction was correct; it will take him days to arrive. “However, where was father? The Lanling Jin, did they ever assist in the rescue?”

Madam Jin’s eyes were downcast, and father looked away.

Jin Ling’s eyes widened in disbelief, ‘They did not help at all?’

“Although I am the Sect Leader's wife, I have less power than him,” Madam Jin spoke bitterly. “It wasn't that we didn't help; Jin Guangshan specifically instructed our men not to.”

As a result, Jin Ling clenched his fists, his hatred for his grandfather increasing.

There was no sun or moon within the cave. They only knew that it had been three days because of the creepy sleep pattern of the Lan Sect's people sleeping and waking involuntarily when the time came. Thus, they could calculate the time by counting how many times Lan Wangji had slept.

“Who would've thought Lan's sleeping schedule would be so useful?” Cangse Sanren turned to Lan Qiren with a smile. “Honestly, that schedule was so annoying.”

“Only because you sleep late,” Lan Qiren countered.

Cangse Sanren rolled her eyes and countered, “And you sleep and wake up too early. What are you all even rushing about?”

Lan Qiren scowled and decided not to say anything else. It will only bring him a headache if he continues to argue with her.

The memory then shifts to Lan Wangji seated in the lotus position, meditating while being careful not to jostle his leg so much. Within the past three days of conserving energy, the injury on his leg didn't worsen and was slowly healing.

The Lan family was finally able to breathe, the weight on their shoulders fading.

“Hanguang-jun is just that cool!” Zizhen muttered cheerfully.

“Of course he is,” Jingyi concurred.

It was then the fourth day..

“Fourth,” Wen Ning gasped. Perhaps the limit of inedia is three to four days, after which they will begin to starve and their spiritual energy will begin to dwindle, but it is still concerning that they are still there, looking for ways to escape.

“They’re okay,” Wen Qing assured him after sensing his concern. “From their appearance, they don't appear tired or struggling; their spiritual energy hasn't yet dropped.”

Wen Ning breathed a sigh of relief.

“Did you go to explore the pool again?” Lan Wangji asked, breaking out of his meditation.

“Yeah, however, I still haven’t found the hole that Jiang Cheng was talking about,” Wei Wuxian responded, holding arrows in one hand and slinging a quiver over his bare shoulder. “That bastard’s fallen asleep back there, so I suspect its body must be blocking the entrance.

“Alright, we’ll need to think of another way,” Lan Wangji agreed, picking up one of the bows Wei Wuxian had brought over and testing the string's durability before breaking off all of the bowstrings and tying them together from top to bottom into a long chord.

The cultivators widened their eyes.

“Don’t tell me…”

“Are we finally gonna see..?”

The disciples kept their gaze fixed on the screen, eager to see how it will turn out.

“Although its skin is hard, a ring of scales under its neck is soft,” Lan Wangji explained, continuing his work.

Wei Wuxian’s face brightened, “That’s good! We can attack this spot!”

“Odds are against us. This monster is no common creature.”

As soon as Lan Wangji finished speaking, with both hands, he stretched the chords taut and immediately flicked his wrists. The chord flashed forth like lightning. A flash of white light flashed across the room, completely destroying the stalagmite ten feet away.

“Woah.”

“Now this is what I’m talking about!”

“I told you it was sharper than knives!”

“This is absolutely perfect! They can now kill the beast!”

The disciples muttered to each other. Lan Qiren was glad they had such a technique; otherwise, what would these two do? The chord assassination is a lethal weapon; this technique is dangerous, especially if used incorrectly. He did, however, teach this technique to his nephews, who perfected it, so he has no doubt Wangji would fail to utilize this weapon properly.

“Chord Assassination Technique?” Wei Wuxian realized.

One of the Gusu Lan Sect's unique techniques was chord assassination. It is used to assassinate dissidents, making it undeniably one of the Gusu Lan Sect's most powerful and versatile fighting techniques.

“Breach through within,” Lan Wangji said.

Wei Wuxian nodded, “I agree as well. However, based on what I've heard about your sect's Chord Assassination Technique, it won't be as effective if it's inside the shell's cramped environment. And your leg injury still hasn’t healed yet. It probably wouldn't be used as well as usual, would it?”

Jiang Wanyin turned to his brother and frowned, “Are you saying you will sacrifice yourself again by breaching within??”

“You do realize one of them had to do it, right?” Jin Zixuan interrupted. At some point, he really didn't want either of them to breach within, fearing that they would be eaten, but they had to do what they had to do.

Jiang Wanyin huffed and crossed his arms, “I don’t like this.”

Nie Huaisang gave a nod, “I don’t like this either.”

Lan Wangji remained silent for a moment before nodding. Both of them realized that forcing themselves to do things they couldn't do would only serve to drag others down.

Wei Wuxian smirked and leaned closer, “Listen to me.”

His explanation became muffled as the time sped up.

“Oh, come on!” Nie Huaisang cried. “We wanna know!”

“I just hope the plan he’s talking about will work,” Mianmian said, hoping that Wei Wuxian would be okay.

“It will,” Jiang Wanyin stated emphatically. He's not happy about his brother sacrificing himself again, but he's Wei Wuxian, and he knows he'll be fine. He trusts him.

A split second later, the strings appeared, weaving from stalactite to stalactite like a spider web. Every time it appeared, slashing thumbs resounded as if a sword had made contact with the cave rocks.

The maze-like strings were aimed above the tortoise.

The cultivators kept a close eye on the two, eager to see them in action.

“Lan Zhan!” he called out, not too loudly. “The String Formation is ready!”

“Mn,” Lan Wangji responded, standing atop of stalagmite not too far away from Wei Wuxian.

The darkness only increased the tension inside the temple.

“Please work,” Jiang Yanli muttered, clasping her hands in anxiousness.

“Alright, we act separately. I’m going to lure it out.”

Right after he said that, Lan Wangji’s face was shown. His brows were knitted together as if frowning, but his eyes were telling them otherwise; it was so expressive, they could

tell Lan Wangji was nervous and worried.

Though it felt wrong to put such an expression on his face, Wei Wuxian's heart warmed seeing how concerned his husband was for him.

“Be careful,” Lan Wangji said quietly.

Without making any noise or creating a ripple in the water, Wei Wuxian dove in. He swam through, uncaring and unafraid even as he approached the large mouth. However, as Wei Wuxian got closer, he saw thousands of skull bones and other bones left behind by its previous victims.

“Quite a messy eater if you ask me,” Song Lan commented, frowning and cringing.

“It's unfortunate how I could easily deal with this thing if I was already the Yiling Patriarch,” Wei Wuxian muttered, observing the dead corpses, uncaring about the eyes that were scrutinizing him.

As a result, cultivators had no doubt that even if Wei Wuxian was not yet the Yiling Patriarch, he would use resentful energy later.

Right after, he noticed a faint red glow coming from a spot between the bones.

“What is that?”

“Don’t be too curious and get away!” Nie Mingjue hissed.

“Please don’t look into it!”

But of course, their requests were unheard. The memory then brought them through the thousands of skeletons, and what was hidden behind the various bones, was a black, rusted sword glowing with resentful energy. Whips of black smoke engulfed it as if it had detected the presence of Wei Wuxian.

And exploded.

Their eyes widened in horror.

“Wei Ying!

“A-Xian!”

“Wei Wuxian!”

Gallons of water were sprayed into the air, and as a result, Lan Wangji, who was clearly waiting for Wei Wuxian, was nearly thrown back by the resulting wind.

“Wei Ying!” he shouted.

Back underwater, the strong current from the explosion sent Wei Wuxian’s hair back to the point where his ribbon came undone, allowing his hair to flow freely.

“Y-Yiling Patriarch,” Lan Qiren muttered, leaving Cangse Sanren and Wei Changze perplexed. Why is he referring to their son as the ‘Yiling Patriarch’? What did his son do to earn such a strange title?

“What is going on?” Wei Changze wondered, growing anxious for his son.

The enraged souls rushed past him, almost pushing him away. Despite this, he gripped the rusted sword buried deep within with all his strength. He can't yet control the chaotic energy, but he did as best he could. If he can get this sword as a weapon, he will be able to slice from within more effectively. He will care later if it were filled with resentful energy or not.

“What are you doing?!” Yu Ziyuan snarled, having freed from the silencing spell. “Leave the sword alone!”

Resentful energy should have a backlash, similar to what happened to him in Cloud Recesses; however, Wei Wuxian did not experience any of it now, which leads them to a conclusion that his resistance to resentful energy has increased significantly since that day.

“Let him do what he wants. It'll be advantageous if he takes the sword,” an unknown cultivator said. “His resistance to resentful energy had increased, so you don’t have to worry. Although the problem would be his core..”

“Let him do what he wants?” Yu Ziyuan repeated, glaring at the man. “You're saying we'll let him use resentful energy just because his resistance to it is high? What are you on about?! Resentful energy is resentful energy! It's unorthodox and evil! He should've learned from what happened before!”

“Then, do you have any suggestions for what he could do? Clearly, there’s none, and besides, he’s soon to be the Yiling Patriarch; resentful energy is his forte.”

“Yiling Patriarch, Yiling Patriarch! Just what is the significance of this title?!” Yu Ziyuan exclaimed.

“You will know soon,” the unknown cultivator responded calmly. “Just let him do what needs to be done.”

Some of them were unsure whether this man was on Wei Wuxian’s side or not.

Because of the commotion, it was no surprise when the tortoise's enormous red eye cracked open.

"Fuck."

"Get away!!"

"Leave!!"

The cultivators exclaimed simultaneously, their bodies trembling in fear for his safety.

Wei Wuxian was then assaulted by even more resentful energy, even more than what had occurred in the Caiyi Lake and the Cloud Recesses, which the cultivators had never ever witnessed their entire lives.

It surged into him, and began attacking his core.

When they saw his core being invaded by resentful souls, their hearts dropped.

"No," Cangse Sanren and Jiang Yanli mumbled, their hands covering their mouths and their hearts racing.

"I'm starting to see why he abandoned the sword path for demonic cultivation," an old cultivator realized, smirking. "Resentful energy is so powerful and distinct that it can do far more than spiritual energy."

Somehow, this infuriated Wei Wuxian, "Do not claim to understand why I abandoned my sword path in favor of demonic cultivation. You know nothing! I agree that resentful energy is powerful, but you do not want to experience what it did to my body, you don't!"

“It’s still powerful,” the man said with a shrug. “Perhaps I’d like to—”

“No!” Wei Wuxian yelled. He cannot, he cannot let anyone try resentful energy. It had already caused significant damage to his previous body without his core. “You can’t!”

“What? You can do it but we can’t?”

“Fuck,” Wei Wuxian’s eyes flickered from red to purplish silver. Why is he so obstinate?! He’s warning him, and yet... “I said you can’t!”

Lan Wangji immediately gripped his husband's hand tightly and whispered, “Wei Ying,” before glaring coldly at the man.

“How selfish of you, Yiling Patriarch! You get all this power and glory, and we, the ones beneath the greatest sects, cannot triumph the same as you! How much power did those resentful souls give you, huh? How much—”

Instantaneously, black whips of resentful energy shot out like lightning all the way toward the man, but before they could attack, Baoshan Sanren appeared in front of the man and dispelled the energy with a flick of her finger.

Everyone was stunned and terrified to speak. Once again, they had witnessed the Yiling Patriarch's rage.

“You heard the Grandmaster,” Baoshan Sanren said, casting a cold sidelong glance at the man. “Do not attempt. Amateurs like you cannot handle the effects of resentful energy, which is why those who attempted to be the Yiling Patriarch weren’t able to top him and failed. Take it as a warning from me,” she said before facing the man, and he immediately felt a zapping sensation all over his body before screaming, light engulfing his whole body.

And then he disappeared.

“Hmm,” Baoshan Sanren hummed contentedly. “I should probably remove more people from this temple.”

The people silently shrieked and took a step back away from her. Baoshan Sanren felt even more pleased.

‘Seriously, what a terrifying lady!’

Wei Wuxian’s eyes then went back to normal, and he was embraced protectively by Lan Wangji.

Proving Yu Ziyuan and Wei Wuxian's point, he soon began to feel the effects of the resentful energy settling within his body. He gasped out, losing his last bit of air as he continued to dominate the sword underwater. Then, the shadow of the head of the beast began to cover him.

“Noo!!!”

“Swim away!!” Jiang Wanyin exclaimed.

The tortoise opened its massive jaws and with a snap, they closed down around Wei Wuxian.

“Senior Wei!”

“Wei Ying!!”

“Wei Wuxian!!”

They all exclaimed, frozen in shock and fear. The insides of the beast were acidic, enough to melt a whole person instantly.

But Wei Wuxian would be fine… He ought to be!

“Wei Ying,” Lan Wangji, Cangse Sanren, and Wei Changze’s whispered simultaneously, their voices shaken and strained.

A burst of resentful energy erupted from the tortoise's mouth.

In an instant, the Xuanwu reared its head back, roaring in pain as it emerged from the water, spraying gallons of water into the air once more.

***‘It came out,’* Lan Wangji whispered, hiding behind a rock.**

“Move, Wangji-xiong!” Nie Huaisang shrieked. “Save Wei-xiong!”

The tortoise moved its head around restlessly in pain, battling the resentful energy within. When the tortoise's jaws could no longer withstand the pressure, its jaws opened, releasing a massive amount of resentful energy.

The released energy was so powerful and intense, many were sure that they could compare it to the resentful energy residing within the Burial Mounds.

The comparison made everyone shudder even more.

“**Could it be..?” Lan Wangji realized and immediately abandoned his thoughts as he pulled the string. Instantly, it wrapped around the neck of the struggling tortoise. Lan Wangji wasted no time swinging around on another string to reach Xuanwu's back, improvising to compensate for the lack of his sword.**

When he landed on the shell, he slammed his hand against the shell and exclaimed, "Wei Ying! Can you hear me?"

"Please respond, A-Ying," Cangse Sanren begged because if he can't…. If he can't, she will….

On the side, Jiang Yanli is doing the same thing.

Then, they were dragged within the Xuanwu's mouth, traveling down and down until they found Wei Wuxian, who held tightly to the sword that was buried deep within the Xuanwu's flesh to keep himself from falling any further.

Cangse Sanren and Jiang Yanli, despite feeling happy to see him, were far from feeling relieved.

At this point, everyone's hearts were both stopping and racing.

"You can do it, Senior Wei!"

"Wei Wuxian, you better hold tightly on that sword or else."

Wei Wuxian opened his eyes; the fierce determination in his eyes burned through the screen that it could intimidate anyone.

"Amazing," Madam Jin gasped out. Never in her whole life had anyone intimidated her with their determination like this.

On the side, Nie Mingjue felt the same sentiment.

Even some had to step back because they could see the same expression of the ruthless Yiling Patriarch on his face. (He's literally the Yiling Patriarch, what are y'all talking about?) Worse, the said man's father was a carbon copy of the Yiling Patriarch, but older. (He's Wei Wuxian's father, for Pete's sake; of course they look alike.)

The sword buried deep within the Xuanwu's flesh pierced through the soft scales under its neck.

"He actually stabbed the neck," Mianmian gaped in astonishment.

"Unbelievable," Jin Zixuan muttered, feeling the same sentiment as his friend.

The tortoise roared in pain, and Lan Wangji was sent swaying back and forth. Despite this, he held on and focused his mind as he activated the chord assassination.

The maze of spider-web-like strings, which had been barely visible to the naked eye until now, suddenly lit up, cutting into the Xuanwu's body and amplifying its pained cries. Lan Wangji clenched his teeth, adamant about killing the beast.

The crowd is anxious, excited, and anticipating. The Lan Family looked at the young Lan Wangji, hoping he would succeed and both boys can finally escape.

Pieces of its shell and bones began to fall to the ground.

The strings were then tightly wrapped around its neck, just above where Wei Wuxian had stabbed through. Lan Wangji jumped back and swung around the neck, adding more strings as he went, before grabbing them all and pulling as hard as he could.

The crowd gaped in disbelief and astonishment.

“Shit..”

“No way.”

“They’re going to kill it..”

As the energy reached its peak, the strings glowed brightly, and a red light flashed.

Immediately, the tortoise's neck was severed, and the head fell into the water.

For a moment, no one could speak, too stunned to even utter a word.

Then..

“They did it,” Sizhui gaped, his eyes stuck on the screen. He then turned to look at Wei Wuxian and Lan Wangji. “You actually did it.”

“To attempt the impossible, huh?” Jiang Fengmian muttered, not bothering to hide his relief and shock.

The audience erupted in applause. Jiang Yanli and Jiang Wanyin can now relax.

“Go Hanguang-jun!”

“Go Senior Wei!!”

“Good work, Wangji,” Lan Qiren whispered, feeling ecstatic and proud of his nephew.

“It wasn’t—”

“You both did a good job,” Wei Changze interrupted with a smile, and Lan Xichen and Madam Lan nodded in agreement.

While they’re at it, Cangse Sanren was fidgeting on her seat, agitated by the fact that her son had not yet emerged from the water.

‘Where is my A-Ying?’

The force and impact of the attack sent rocks flying everywhere.

While everyone else was celebrating, the young Lan Wangji, was not.

“Wei Ying,” he whispered.

“I’m fine!” Wei Wuxian reassured, holding his husband’s hand. “I will be fine!”

And Cangse Sanren believed him.

The Xuanwu’s head sank further, and Wei Wuxian fell with it. Not far from him, the sword he picked up earlier had sunk to the deep end of the pool.

Despite their joy, Wei Wuxian's undone hair and his resistance to resentful energy served as a stark reminder. Wei Wuxian had yet to become the Yiling Patriarch.

And the memory darkened as the memory came to a close.

Now that the memory was over, the crowd were left time to talk with each other.

The Wen Sect really declared war after luring the disciples into that cave, and to say they were enraged would be an understatement.

Jin Guangshan ordered his men not to in order to protect his sect in case Wen Ruohan planned to destroy the great sects. To put it bluntly, Jin Guangshan is a puppy eager to please its master, and Wen Ruohan wrapped around his finger, toying with him when originally he also had intended to destroy his sect as well.

“That was so impressive,” Jingyi cheered. “I wish to learn chord assassination soon!”

“I want to learn as well!”

Lan Qiren was hesitant. Only the inner family of the Lan had been trained for this technique, but this technique is also powerful. It could come in handy if his disciples were in need or if they lost their weapons. His ancestors wouldn't be so upset if he shared his knowledge of this technique, right?

“After when this is done, I will train you.”

The Lan disciples were only joking. They knew they couldn't learn the technique because they weren't descended from any of the inner Lan families, but their Grandmaster agreed so easily.

On the side, Qingheng-jun nodded as well, and the Lan disciples cheered once more. Some were envious that they had the opportunity to learn such a powerful technique.

While everyone else was talking, Wen Qing stole a glance at the immortal and then lowered her gaze, stopping her eyes on her sleeves.

Earlier…

She reluctantly accepted her hand as both of them walk towards the portal. When she opened her eyes, they were at a top of a cliff. To be precise, they were at the Nightless City!

She gasped, "W-What are we doing here?!"

"To retrieve something," Baoshan Sanren stated unequivocally.

Below them, they could see a number of disciples running as if they're in a hurry. She let her gaze wander until she came across someone in particular.

Jiang Wanyin..

When she saw a ghost target charging towards him at full speed, she couldn't help but reach out, but he was saved by someone else…

Wei Wuxian…

Why on earth did she reach out as if she could save Jiang Wanyin? Impulse maybe? She then dropped her hand and turned to face the immortal. She now understood what they were doing here.

"Let's get this over with."

The two waited until both brothers separated, and once they did, the immortal grabbed Wen Qing's hand and was transported below the top cliff where they had previously stood.

Wei Wuxian was looking for the target when he saw two silhouettes not far away. He assumed it was the ghost targets when he noticed that something was not right. Their forms are not those of target ghosts, and they are not emitting negative (resentful) energy as well, so he concluded that they were humans. Nevertheless, he was skeptical. That could be ghosts impersonating a human body, but that's also impossible because no ghost can impersonate a human body without noticeable flaws, so he moved in closer, walking like a cat in the dark.

"Wei Wuxian," a woman's voice called out, and he came to a halt.

The two silhouettes emerged from the fog and revealed themselves. The other woman looks ethereal to be real, and her presence—he could feel it—was full of authority and confidence, and her spiritual energy level was greater than anyone he had ever sensed in his entire life—it was overwhelming. The other woman, on the other hand, was equally pretty, and was nothing like the other. Her spiritual energy level was lower than his, but not noticeably so, and her presence screamed Jiang Cheng, but in a more subdued way. He was certain that the first woman had to be powerful sect leader from another sect, and the second was her right hand (possibly?).

"Who are you?" he asked suspiciously. "How do you know me?"

"You're quite popular among your peers."

'Huh, I guess I am,' Wei Wuxian smugly thought before snapping out of it and narrowing his eyes at the two women. "This competition is only for disciples. I doubt that full-grown women like yourselves are included in the competition."

Baoshan Sanren smiled, "You are correct; we are not"

"Then what are you doing here? How did you two get into this forest?" he inquired once more.

"That's not something you should be aware of."

Now it was the perfect time to be suspicious. He took a backward step. Perhaps they're a foe? How else could they get into a place like this? The Wen Sect had to have security or talismans set up around here to detect intruders, but no one, not even the sect leaders, had detected them.

"We are here for something important," Wen Qing said, keeping her face neutral, but in reality, she had missed this face of Wei Wuxian— this handsome, youthful face with mischievous eyes of his, rather than the tired, depressed Yiling Patriarch, whose cheekbones were sunken. His dark-circled eyes staring soullessly into the Burial Mound's dark sky.

"And what is that?" Wei Wuxian wondered, his hand tightly gripping his bow. "I'll have you know that—" Before Wei Wuxian finish his sentence, Baoshan Sanren took something from her sleeves and moved in front of him like a lightning, slapping the talisman onto his chest.

"As she said, something important," Baoshan Sanren whispered, smiling as they were both engulfed in white light.

And Wei Wuxian screamed…

Chapter End Notes

Merry Christmas to all! I hope everyone is having a good day because I am not. There's a reason why I didn't upload this chapter sooner; it's been raining nonstop for the past week, and my hometown has been flooded. I had intended to publish this as a Christmas gift for my readers, but I never got to. Everyone, please accept my apologies. I hope this chapter brightens everyone's day as much as it brightens mine!

P.S: Should I put this story up on Wattpad? I feel like I'm going to enjoy reading the comments on each paragraph.

Forgetting Envies and Disaster Arises

Chapter Notes

Hello, everyone! I'm finally back after such a long absence HAHA! I sincerely apologize for not updating sooner than I anticipated. Life really loves fucking people up, and it fucks me so well.

Anyway, you're not here to listen to my rants. Have fun reading!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

While Jiang Fengmian dragged his wife away to speak privately, Baoshan Sanren let her gaze pause at Wei Wuxian. She had another proposal for the Wen doctor, but even the one she had just made seemed impossible now, despite the fact that she had the power to do so. Setting aside something that someone had sacrificed for another person would be too cruel. Wen Qing will undoubtedly not hear any of this.

Perhaps it is best to simply dismiss the proposal. If she decided to pursue this, it might awaken something in the people—a nightmare as they call it—but a miracle, a relief to some.

A poor psyche, so kind and forgiving, forsaken by the world they'd come to reckon as their ally, deserved a proper rest and let them walk into the light where heaven's paradise is, where kind and loving souls will forever guide them and take them further beyond that paradise.

She sighed and turned away from the crowd, her gaze fixed on the massive statue in front of her.

“How unfortunate,” she lamented.

He expected the pain to take over his body, but instead, he felt a warm sensation all over, as if he were wrapped in a warm blanket, which allowed him to relax slightly. However, the warm sensation eventually faded, and the talisman that had been slapped into his chest burned and disintegrated into dust.

“A strong one, I see,” she said, relieved.

Dazed and with awe, Wei Wuxian stared at the floating ball of spiritual energy in front of him, “What is that?”

“That is a golden core,” Wen Qing answered instead, her eyes focused on the core as another painful memory flashed in her mind that she had to calm herself and close her eyes.

“A golden core?” Wei Wuxian asked in disbelief, his gaze fixed on the golden ball of energy.

“Yes,” Baoshan Sanren responded, “your golden core, to be precise.”

“Mine?!” Wei Wuxian exclaimed. “What are you—”

Baoshan Sanren immediately cuts him off, “Before you say anything, I did not steal or removed your core.”

“Then what—”

“This is for your future self,” she said, and the ball of energy vanished with a swipe of her right hand.

“My future self?” his eyes widened. “Are you both from the future?”

Baoshan Sanren only smiled, and that reaction was enough to feed his suspicion.

“There’s no way!”

The possibility of time travel has always been more of an idealized concept than an actual, conceivable truth—something Wei Wuxian had read through a handful of books, yet he stayed fixated on the idea for years now. However, there had been no record of a cultivator who traveled through time. Originally, he thought of this theory because, if it became possible, he'd like to see into the future and see if his future self and loved ones are happy. He attempted to make multiple talismans and studied diligently, but even his book knowledge was lacking in some areas, so he eventually abandoned this theory in his mind and did not share it with anyone else. Some will probably say that he's saying ridiculous things again, which he usually does, but this time he was dead serious.

"There's no way you two could have traveled through time! How did you do it?!" Wei Wuxian inquired, he did not bother hiding his interest.

"Well, someone in the future, a brilliant, talented man, created a time-traveling talisman. Thanks to him, we were able to travel to this timeline," Wen Qing replied, her face solemn yet fond.

Wei Wuxian gaped, "Who?"

Who was this brilliant, smart man who invented it first?

As if she read his mind, Baoshan Sanren smiled and said, "We cannot tell you."

"Then may I know what happened in the—"

"We cannot tell you the reason for it will change the events of what's going to happen to your current timeline. However, I am going to tell you to be strong for everything and not give up. Do not isolate yourself from your loved ones, and do not be stubborn. Express your thoughts and pain so as to help yourself and ease the hearts of those who are concerned about you. Lastly, do not misunderstand Lan Wangji's words and his actions and try to hear him out."

Wei Wuxian was stunned, unable to comprehend what this lady had told him. Of course, he knew that something would happen soon as long as the Wen Clan continues to thrive. He frequently shares his thoughts and pains with his siblings, but he knew there were a few things they should not know. He knows he's stubborn as well, but was he also a stubborn man in the future, as this lady had to warn him? He's so confused; however, what he's perplexed about is how this lady knew about the second jade and how his name was mentioned in this conversation.

"How come you brought up Lan Zhan?" He asked, his eyes narrowing in wary. "Do you know him?"

"Who hasn't heard of Gusu Lan's second jade?" Baoshan Sanren asked as if it were the most obvious thing in the world, which it is.

After a brief moment of silence, Baoshan Sanren decided it was time to depart. Both she and Wen Qing turned their backs on him; however, Wei Wuxian grabbed the immortal's wrist.

"Wait, before you go," he said, lowering his head for a second before raising it and looking the immortal in the eyes. "W-Why do you need my golden core? W-Was it—"

He didn't get a chance to finish his sentence before Wen Qing placed her hand on his head and stared at him, both fondly and in what Wei Ying assumed was pain. He's so confused; why do these women always have those painful eyes, as if they're sorry for him?

"Farewell, Wei Wuxian," Baoshan Sanren said as another portal appeared before them. "Be strong."

"Wait!"

Too late, Wen Qing and Baoshan Sanren had already entered the portal, and it quickly closed, leaving him alone. He can't believe he encountered two-time travelers. Was he hallucinating or...

“Ow!”

Nope, he’s not dreaming alright. He was dazed for a split second before an arrow struck beside him, causing him to look up and see Wen Chao.

“Wei Wuxian!”

Wei Wuxian gripped his arrow in annoyance, “Wen Chao.”

He'll reflect on what happened later.

Two Hours later…

Wei Wuxian regarded the second jade with guilt. He didn't mean to grab the ribbon, but if he hadn't, it would have fallen to the ground! Wei Wuxian then turned to face Lan Wangji, his eyes cast downward as Lan Xichen silently consoled him.

“Lastly, do not misunderstand Lan Wangji’s words and his actions and try to hear him out.”

That's what the lady told him earlier. Lan Wangji despised him; he could tell by the way he acts and talks around him, but Lady advised him not to misinterpret his words and actions. If that's the case, can he assume Lan Wangji doesn't completely despise him despite the harsh acts and words thrown at him? Ugh, he does not know. He is at a loss for what to do.

“You’ve been silent for a while,” Jiang Wanyin said, standing beside him, puzzled. “What’s up with you?”

“Someone just dropped a bomb in front of me, Jiang Cheng,” Wei Wuxian responded and sighed. “I don’t know what to do with it.”

Maybe he'll try to talk to Lan Wangji soon.

"How can a golden core be imitated without it dissipating?" Wen Qing wondered. The energy of the golden core flows like an endless river of water in someone else's meridians, and suddenly imitating it without suppressing it and its energy will undoubtedly cause the core to dissipate faster.

Baoshan Sanren turned around to face her, "Although simply imitating a golden core is likely to dissipate or malfunction, sealing it ensures that the energy and the core itself stay in one piece, in the same way, that securing a jar prevents unwanted air from entering."

This was what she intended to do in the first place: temporarily confine the core in a containment space talisman until it's time to return it to its rightful owner.

Wen Qing's eyes widened, "One's core can be sealed?"

She'd never heard of this case before, but what are the chances that the immortal is telling her this now? This has piqued her interest in golden cores even more.

"What are the chances of a golden core being sealed completely?" Wen Qing inquired eagerly. She wishes she'd brought her notes with her.

"In my case, 100 percent," Baoshan Sanren responded. "If I seal one's core, it could be equivalent to possessing a spiritual sword: you can swing it and ride on it, but you cannot access its full power, so in conclusion, you go nowhere. Frustrating when you know you can, and you used to do it. You have a memory and the necessary knowledge, but nothing happens."

Only a powerful person can execute such a powerful move, but Wen Qing argues, "Pardon me, but I think a golden can only be sealed when it is still intact in a person's body."

“That's what you thought because you have not arrived at that conclusion,” Baoshan Sanren responded with an expression Wen Qing couldn't decipher. “I studied a lot over the last hundred years and learned a lot from them. I will have you know I once removed my core to test the sealing magic. I also tested it while the core is also inside my body. With that said, either strategy works.”

‘She removed her core once?!’ Wen Qing couldn't believe it, “But how did your core not dissipate at some point? Even if you did seal it before removing it, you will be unable to utilize it now that it has been removed from within you!”

“You’re right,” Baoshan Sanren said as a small black smoke appeared on her hand. “That’s one of the reasons why I studied resentful energy.”

Wen Qing gaped in disbelief, “What?”

“Resentful energy helped me for some time after I became an ordinary person,” she explained as the black ball of smoke disappeared from her hand. “It was hard and a nightmare for even someone like me, but I managed. It kept me alive while I sought ways to put my core back.”

‘At some point, an immortal like her became an ordinary human. She is like Wei Wuxian,’ Wen Qing’s mind unconsciously provided. *‘Perhaps she relates to him because she has been in a similar situation.’*

"I assumed you were successful in completely sealing your core after you removed it, but Immortal, did you even realize that your sealing magic will be useless after you removed the core inside you? You can only utilize a golden core once it is in its user’s body,” Wen Qing countered because there were some things she did not fully understand. As a doctor who studied golden cores, she should be aware of this case. “It is the same as you said, you can have a spiritual sword, you can swing it and ride on it, but you cannot access its full power, so in conclusion, you go nowhere. Your magic is useless.”

“Perhaps, but did you assume I sealed my core and removed it from within me without a plan?” Baoshan Sanren responded with a smile, pleased to see the Wen doctor so enthusiastic. “I also created a talisman that allows me to temporarily confine a core in a containment space to seal it and not let it dissipate until it's time to return it to its rightful owner. However, at the time, the talisman was powered by resentful energy.”

Wen Qing could not utter a word. This was all too much for her to process in her mind.

"To alleviate some of your confusion, the talisman I created can be powered by both resentful and spiritual energy," she continued, her eyes trained toward the door. Outside, she can hear a couple arguing.

Jiang Fengmian and Yu Ziyuan perhaps.

'*That is why she stated that both methods of removing and sealing the core, whether from within or outside the body, are effective. It was all thanks to her talisman and the resentful energy that aided her. Such a genius immortal. She already thought outside the box,'* Wen Qing observed as she gazed at the immortal's back.

If she has the opportunity to learn how to seal a golden core before or after removing it from its sacred place… If she actually has to learn how to utilize resentful energy…

After noticing her silence, Baoshan Sanren responded, "You can seal a core, Wen Qing."

"What?" Wen Qing asked in disbelief.

"You are a gifted doctor; transplanting a golden core is an incredible feat," Baoshan Sanren praises with a smile on her face. "I am confident you will know how to seal a golden core soon."

Despite the confusion, Wen Qing contended, "I don't think you understand; I am not a talented doctor, and from what you told me earlier, you used resentful energy, which I doubt I'll learn anytime soon, and I am afraid to—"

"That was my case. You, however, do not need to learn resentful energy," Baoshan Sanren cuts her off, the smile gone from her lips. "If you are dedicated and try to strengthen your

golden core, your talent will be sufficient for you to achieve the skill; don't worry; you will learn from me."

Did she just get the Immortal to train her?

Moments later…

Baoshan Sanren turned around and silenced everyone, "The memory is starting, relax now."

Yu Ziyuan and Jiang Fengmian came out of the room in time, their expressions unreadable making Jiang Wanyin sigh in frustration. Just what did the two talk about again for them to be like this?

"Oh, I can't wait to see what's going to happen," Jingyi muttered excitedly and Nie Huaisang leaned closer to the disciples with his fan covering half of his face.

"You all won't like it at all," he said, causing the disciples to shudder.

Wei Wuxian's body sank deeper and deeper into the water.

The cultivators completely forgot that this man just defeated the tortoise and is now drowning.

Wei Changze looked at the screen in fear as he asked with difficulty, "Why isn't my son swimming up?"

There was a splash. Lan Wangji had jumped into the water, desperately searching for Wei Wuxian.

“Wei Ying!” he called.

“He’s over there!” A-Qing pointed in the other direction, but it was pointless knowing that young Lan Wangji won’t ever hear her.

Lan Wangji then looked underwater and as soon as he saw Wei Wuxian sinking deeper, he swam and grabbed him, pulling him up all the way to the surface by wrapping an arm around his waist.

Cangse Sanren and Wei Changze could finally breathe again. They knew Lan Wangji would save their son, but seeing it happen in front of their eyes was surreal.

“Thank you, Lan Wangji,” Cangse Sanren said, smiling at the second jade, who returned the smile.

“It was no problem.”

Ah, seeing his husband smiling with his parents just made Wei Wuxian’s heart melt.

Reaching the surface, Wei Wuxian did not move a muscle, causing Lan Wangji to grow worried.

“Wei Ying!” he called again.

Lan Sizhui worriedly looked at his Xian-gege. Had he been underwater for too long? He could not tell because of the time skips.

“He’s going to be okay, Sizhui,” Jingyi assured his friend after noticing his concern.

“Yeah!” Zizhen piped in. “He’s strong after all.”

‘He isn’t,’ Wen Qing lamented.

Wei Wuxian was completely unconscious, leaning limply against Lan Wangji's chest, his untied hair tangled.

This scene, with Lan Wangji clutching the other's waist so tightly, was so intimate.

“It would be if that tortoise's head wasn't in the background,” Nie Huaisang grumbled.

Damn, Lan Zhan had been holding him like that for a long time. Wei Wuxian lamented internally. He didn't even get to feel how tough and sturdy Lan Wangji’s younger body is because he was too preoccupied with being unconscious and everything else. Also, he is holding him so closely by the waist!

“Where did the *‘I do not touch strangers,’* go again, Lan Zhan?” Wei Wuxian whispered, his lips quirking up in the corner, waiting for his husband's reaction.

“We are not strangers,” Lan Wangji declared emphatically.

So cute!

Wei Wuxian chuckled, “Of course, we aren’t.”

The intimacy between the two grew stronger as Lan Wangji delicately brushed some hair off Wei Wuxian's cheek. The touch alone made Wei Wuxian shiver.

Then his eyes snapped open.

“What’s happening?! What’s happening?!” he exclaimed frantically, immediately looking around them. “Is it dead?! Is it dead?!”

“How are you this hyper when you just drowned?” Jin Ling asked, looking over at his uncle in disbelief. There was also that time when he and Wei Wuxian were on a night hunt, and despite his minor injury, Wei Wuxian was still fussing over him, asking if he was okay.

“That’s just how he is,” Jiang Wanyin responded as he rolled his eyes.

Wei Wuxian lightly flopped, causing both of their bodies to sink deeper into the water. Lan Wangji’s arm tightened around his waist as he responded, “It is.”

Wei Wuxian’s gaze was blank as though he had trouble realizing what was going on until he said, “It’s dead? It’s dead….. Great! It’s dead.”

“You both did an excellent job,” Madam Lan said, her face tense from the previous scene. “You both deserved a good rest.”

“They cannot rest in that place,” Cangse Sanren interjected. “They’re still trapped. They need to find a way to escape.”

“That’s right,” Madam Jin concurred, feeling a bit worried for the two boys. “However, I heard earlier that Jiang Wanyin was going to rescue the two, so we don't need to worry any longer.”

“After all that, even if they can't rest, they still need to conserve some of their spiritual energy. They’re both tired,” Xiao Xingchen said, feeling the same sentiment as Madam Jin.

As if remembering something, Wei Wuxian added, “Oh right, the hole! The hole underwater. Quick, let’s go. Let’s get out through the hole.”

Lan Wangji noticed something odd about his behavior and inquired, “What is wrong?”

“Nothing!” Wei Wuxian responded, a little too enthusiastically. “Let’s go out as soon as possible; there’s no time to lose!”

Lan Qiren turned to Wei Wuxian, his eyes full of silent accusations, “You’re after that sword, aren’t you?”

And if Wei Wuxian’s silence bothered him, no one had to know. Even Nie Mingjue seemed puzzled as to why he desired that sword so desperately.

There was indeed to time to lose, so Lan Wangji nodded, “I will take you.”

“Hanguang-jun is really taking his time holding Senior Wei that close,” Zizhen said with a dreamy expression.

“Please remove that expression from your face,” Jingyi said, moving away from his friend and closer to Sizhui. “You’re getting creepier.”

Wei Wuxian declined, “There’s no need—”

Lan Wangji, on the other hand, had already taken a massive inhale, puffing up his cheeks into an adorable expression. Wei Wuxian stared wide-eyed for a few seconds, then sighed as he did the same.

The two submerged themselves.

The cultivators seemed to hold their breath as if expecting something to happen.

Even while underwater, the cultivators can see two people swimming further down. The purplish-blue background contrasted beautifully with the dark colors of Wei Wuxian and Lan Wangji's robes. Amidst the river of bubbles, their long hair flowed freely around them, and their hands were clasped tightly, making the scene more mystical yet lovely all at once.

“Even in dangerous situations, they feed us dog food,” a female cultivator laughed delightfully. “However, I'm not complaining.”

“Neither do I,” her other friend squealed. “They’re so beautiful.”

“Both of you shut up!” An unknown cultivator complained but the women only stuck out their tongues at him.

A moment later, the two finally emerged from the water. Wei Wuxian spat out a mouthful of bloody water and wiped his face, covering it with a purplish red. He looked even worse than before.

“What’s wrong?” he asked. “Why isn’t there a hole?”

Water dripped down Lan Wangji's wet hair. He didn't answer. The two exchanged glances. Both thought of a daunting possibility. It was likely that under the intense pain, when the Xuanwu of Slaughter was madly waving its limbs, it either shook the underwater rocks or kicked into a certain place, coincidentally causing the only hole that they could escape from... to be blocked.

Jiang Wanyin regretted leaving his brother. Looking at how exhausted he and Lan Wangji are, he wonders how they survived there for seven days. Damn, why was he so late?!

“Oh my god,” Jiang Yanli gasped out in anxiousness. “Just be patient; you two will be saved.”

Wei Wuxian fought his way free of Lan Wangji's arm. He dove into the water. Lan Wangji quickly followed. Despite their efforts, they were unable to locate any holes. Not even one that could let a single person through.

“What do we do now?” Wei Wuxian asked helplessly.

After a while of silence, Lan Wangji calmly responded, “Let’s get out first,” as he aids Wei Wuxian in climbing out of the water.

“I feel bad,” a young man commented. “Looking at Wei Wuxian, I think he's about to collapse at any moment.”

“Right, look how pale he is.”

Wei Changze and Cangse Sanren heard that, and they were right. They also noticed that he seemed slower than usual after climbing out of the water, indicating that fatigue was gradually catching up with their son.

“Of course, swimming underwater for days with no food or clothes would eventually make a person sick; it'd be a miracle if Wei Wuxian was fine,” another man said, shaking his head.

“Yeah, right, but seeing Wei Wuxian sick looks strange.”

Both were completely depleted of energy. When they emerged from the water, they were both covered in a bloody shade of purple. Wei Wuxian took off his clothes. Wringing them dry and flinging them around in the air. However, he couldn't help but curse, “Are we being toyed with or what? I was thinking that if nobody came to help us, we wouldn't be able to kill it even if we wanted to, and that was why I went for it. And now, we finally have it dead, and the son-of-a-bitch made the hole collapse. Fuck!”

The cultivators all flinched in surprise. Normally, cultivators would not be surprised if a person cursed unexpectedly because they are instinctive. Wei Wuxian, on the other hand, was a ray of sunshine; he exudes positivity while also being mischievous. He relentlessly annoyed people, even talking back to Lan Qiren and saving a Lan disciple he'd never met (which made a lot of people angry on Wei Wuxian's behalf because that ungrateful bastard inadvertently set off a chain of events that led to his demise). Also, he wasn't even concerned about being kicked out of Cloud Recesses for punching Jin Zixuan because he knew it'll happen eventually (though he was more concerned by Yu Ziyuan's harsh words). No matter what, he was always full of energy, so him.

And yet, this uncontrolled anger totally flipped them off as if it was their first time watching the wrath of the Yiling Patriarch. Moreover, this proved that him being furious meant that the situation was dead serious.

Even Cangse Sanren and Wei Changze didn't mind the cursing as they understand their son's anger.

Hearing the *'fuck',* Lan Wangji's brows twitched. He wanted to say something but held it in. Wei Wuxian continued to flung his clothes around when suddenly his legs gave out.

"Wei Wuxian!"

"A-Xian!"

"Wei Ying!"

They all chorused. Their feet were moving forward to catch the aforementioned man when they realized they couldn't.

Instantaneously, Lan Wangji lunged forward just in time to catch him.

Wei Wuxian tiredly spoke, “It's fine, it's fine. Used up all my energy.” He then added, “Oh, right, Lan Zhan, did you see that I was holding a sword when I was in its mouth? Where did the sword go?”

Nie Mingjue and Lan Qiren’s eyes narrowed as they said, *‘I knew it,’* simultaneously in their minds. Mind you that that sword is filled with thousands of years of resentful energy, so it is bound to be a powerful weapon. However, that powerful weapon cannot be contained or tamed as it is its own master; and even if a person could tame it, or if the weapon itself chose to follow its master's commands, that does not change the fact that it can betray them at any given moment. From the creation of that weapon until now, no man has ever been able to handle that powerful weapon, besides possibly the Yiling Laozu.

“How are you still concerned about a sword full of resentful energy?!” An unknown cultivator grumbled. “Oh right, its power is so great that you might have been tempted to use it all for yourself!”

Wei Ying sighed in annoyance, *‘These people are really obsessed with provoking me.’*

“Didn't we already agree not to come to such conclusions without knowing the reason?” Mianmian responded, glaring at the man. “Are you stupid or what?”

“What, it's clear that Wei Wuxian expressed his interest in resentful energy in the past. Is that reason not enough for you?” The unknown cultivator countered, prompting Jiang Wanyin to turn to the man as his ring sparked, indicating that he was either angry or annoyed.

“I suggest that you shut your fucking mouth before I whip you with Zidian right now.”

“A-Cheng,” Jiang Yanli reprimanded, but she couldn't deal with her brother's rage at the moment. She, too, was irritated.

The man scoffed in return, not wanting to speak any further. The power of Zidian is terrifying; being whipped with it is a path toward death.

On the side, Nie Huaisang, stared at the young Wei Wuxian for a moment before a thought came to him. He has the impression that the Stygian Tiger Amulet is actually the sword that sunk earlier. He also has the impression that it is some kind of amplifier artifact. Because of its unique properties and origins, which include 400 years of soaking in the resentful energy of the many dead people within the shell, as well as the energy of the Xuanwu of Slaughter, it increases the power a demonic cultivator can use or access. Wei Wuxian forged the Stygian Amulet inside the Burial Mounds to give himself more fierce corpses and power to deal with the war.

However, this young Wei Wuxian was still a curious being. If that sword piqued his interest, he might investigate it further, regardless of whether it reeks of resentful energy.

Nie Huaisang shook his head, “Ugh, why are you like this, Wei-xiong?”

Lan Wangji responded, "It sank underwater. Is there anything about it?"

For some reason, Wei Wuxian looked disappointed, “It sank? Never mind, then.”

Earlier, Wei Wuxian had been clutching an iron sword when he heard a deluge of screams. The sword had to have belonged to a cultivator who had been devoured by the Xuanwu of Slaughter and had been hidden for at least 400 years within the shell's corpse mound. Wei Wuxian had wanted to keep the sword and examine it properly, but now that it had sunk, it seemed appropriate to let the matter drop. If he mentioned it too much and Lan Wangji picked up on what he was getting at, they'd be at odds with each other all over again.

Lan Wangji wouldn't blame his husband for thinking that, knowing that his younger self would chastise him even more. He internally blamed his younger self for not being the person Wei Ying felt comfortable talking to. If he mentioned that sword and perhaps heard him out, then maybe in the future they wouldn’t be at odds with each other as well. It was only because he was a rule-abiding person who is difficult to talk to that led them to fight every time they met in the past.

Sensing his husband's inner conflict. Wei Wuxian booped his nose, “What is my dear husband thinking so much? Is there another man in your mind?” he teased.

“No,” he responded a bit too firmly. “Only Wei Ying,”

Wei Wuxian giggled.

Swallowing up his disappointment, Wei Wuxian continued to drag his legs forward as Lan Wangji followed behind him in silence. A few steps later, Wei Wuxian's legs gave out again.

“A-Ying!”

“A-Xian!”

Cangse Sanren and Jiang Yanli screamed. It was clear as daylight that Wei Wuxian was on his limit. If he keeps moving without resting, it’s obvious what the result will be, and neither Cangse Sanren nor Jiang Yanli wanted that.

For the disciples, the sight was incomparably strange. Despite Wei Wuxian’s annoying yet positive nature, he never succumbed to his injuries. And, even though certain situations were impossible to solve, he finds a way to make them possible, making him the perfect embodiment of the Jiang motto. He had solved every problem he had encountered, and if he fails, he will try again and again until he succeeds. That's how good Wei Wuxian is: he never gives up and has no boundaries/limitations.

That was far from the case. Wei Wuxian may be strong, brave, and powerful, but he is still as fragile as glass. He is easily hurt and sometimes succumbs to his injuries, making the majority of the Lan Sect (particularly the disciples), Jiang Wanyin, Jin Ling, and Lan Wangji worried for him. Jin Ling even recalls stabbing him in the abdomen at Jinlin Tai and feeling guilty after what happened. Furthermore, he didn't want to think about how Lan Wangji reacted after that because it would keep him awake at night.

But there was Wei Wuxian, his arm bleeding from Su She's arrow, his lungs full of water mixed with Xuanwu's blood, and his legs so tired he couldn't stand, let alone walk.

“Senior Wei,” Jingyi mumbled anxiously.

Once again, Lan WangJi caught him immediately. This time, he put one hand against Wei Wuxian’s forehead. After contemplating for a few moments, he spoke, “Wei Ying, you... are so warm.”

Wen Qing mumbled a curse. Once again, her hands itched to work but it was pointless. She sighed and spoke, “Even in this life I still continue to worry for him.”

Wei Wuxian put his hand on his forehead as well, “Lan Zhan, you're also really warm.”

Lan Wangji took his hand away gently, speaking in a tepid tone, “That is because your hand is cold.”

“I think I do feel a bit dizzy.”

Some were silently pleased to see him in this situation because, at this point, they couldn't openly bully him because of what happened to the previous cultivators who were kicked out by the immortal and how some were overprotective of him.

Although their silent delight and the slight quirk of the corner of their lips were noticed by Nie Huaisang,

“There are just some useless dogs who deserved to be served to some vengeful yaos,” Nie Huaisang said, turning to his older brother. “What do you think, Da-ge?”

“What are you talking about?”

About four to five days ago, Wei Wuxian put all of the herbs in the perfume sachet on Lan Wangji's leg. He only wiped the brand mark on his chest a few times. In the past few days, he hadn't rested well, and he had just been rummaging through the corpse mound and the pool water, which only worsened his injury.

As a result, Wei Wuxian had a fever.

After managing for a while, Wei WuXian felt dizzier and dizzier. He then decided to just sit down where he was, musing, "How could I get a fever so easily? I haven't gotten a fever in years."

Jiang Yanli desperately wanted to enter the screen so she could help his sick brother and, if possible, make his favorite soup. It was true that her brother did not often get sick or had never once gotten sick. If he did, it was only because he had been severely injured or pushed himself to his limits, and during those times, she was the one who looked after him despite receiving a reprimand from her mother.

"A-Xian," she muttered, tears welling up in the corners of her eyes. She can't stand seeing her brother in this state.

"He'll be okay, A-Li," Jin Zixuan said, trying to comfort her uneasy heart.

Lan Wangji didn't feel like expressing his opinion on the *'so easily'* part of his words. Instead, he gently said, "Lie down."

The world began to blur and sway back and forth. The cultivators were inside a simulation of what Wei Wuxian was seeing.

"Damn, I feel dizzy as well just seeing his point of view," an unknown cultivator remarked.

Wei Wuxian did as he was told. Lan Wangji then took his hand and began to pass him spiritual energy, surrounded by a soft blue light. Wei Wuxian had been lying for a

while, but he soon sat up.

“Lie down properly,” Lan Wangji commanded.

“Just listen to him,” Wen Qing said as she massaged her temples. Why is this kid trying to sit up when he’s sick? If she had been there, she would have hit him just to knock him out and give him the rest he needed.

In contrast to what Wen Qing was feeling, Jiang Yanli was thankful as she finally let out the breath she had been holding for so long, “Thank you, Lan-er-gongzi.”

Lan Wangji responded with a nod, but his face was filled with concern.

A moment later, Wei Wuxian drew his hand back.

Wen Qing’s brows twitched, “What the hell are you—”

“You don’t need to give me any,” he said weakly. “You don’t have much left yourself.”

Some people frowned at the explanation because he clearly needed some spiritual energy. Lan Qiren, Madam Lan, and Qingheng-jun, on the other hand, were grateful. It was reassuring to see that Wei Wuxian cared as much about Wangji as he did about the other.

“So selfless,” Song Lan mumbled.

“Yet Wei Wuxian is right,” Nie Mingjue responded. “At least one of them must have spiritual energy to last a little longer.”

“Yes,” Lan Xichen concurred, his concern evident for his brother’s husband. “Also, Wei-gongzi needs someone to take care of him.”

Lan Wangji shook his head and snatched the other's hand again, ordering, “Lie down properly.”

Despite his dizziness and the cold sweat of exhaustion, Wei Wuxian then threw a tantrum, “It hurts! You’re pressing too hard!” he slammed his fist against the ground. Such riotous movement usually indicates a patient's recovery from illness. However, the level of dizziness shown earlier proved that this was not the case.

Having grown accustomed to Wei Wuxian's terrible complaints, most of the cultivators sighed exasperatedly at the boy.

Meanwhile, Wen Qing and Jiang Wanyin chorused, “Stop moving around and listen to him!”

“Woah,” Wei Wuxian gaped, “you two are made for each other; even your words match!”

“What the hell are you talking about?!” Jiang Wanyin exclaimed, his cheeks flushing slightly.

Wen Qing rolled her eyes, “Stop spouting nonsense, Wei Wuxian.”

Yu Ziyuan noticed her son’s flustered expression and cast a sidelong glance at the Wen doctor.

After a few seconds of Wei Wuxian’s tantrum, Lan Wangji gave in and asked, “What do you want?”

“I want to lie somewhere else!”

“Where would you want to lie, at such a place?”

“Let me borrow your lap for a while, will you?” Wei Wuxian asked, still managing to joke around despite his condition.

Jin Zixuan snorted a bit, “Even at this time you’re still flirting with him? You’re unbelievable, Wei Wuxian.”

“Hey, Lan-er-gege’s lap is free real estate,” Wei Wuxian gloated. “Well of course, I'm the only one who gets to lie down on it.”

Jin Zixuan shot him a disgusted face, “Of course, you're the only one. One would be killed before they could experience that free real estate of a lap.”

Lan Wangji did not express his thoughts, but looking at how his ears are getting red, Jin Zixuan figured that his words may be right.

Wei Wuxian laughed, amused by his husband's reaction.

Ugh, these two are undeniably made for each other.

“Stop fooling around,” Lan Wangji said, his face expressionless.

“I'm serious, Lan Zhan; my head is spinning. You're not a girl; why can't I borrow it for a little while?”

“Maybe because it turns him on?” a female cultivator speculates, earning her a slap on the arm from her friend.

“Shut it!” her friend half exclaimed. “Why would you say that?!”

“Well, I mean, if someone asks for my lap and turns out to be someone I like, I'm sure I'll get turned on,” the other countered smugly.

“Only you have thought of that; what if Hanguang-jun is just shy? I would, too, if someone wanted to lie on my lap.”

“Perhaps, but I stand by my words.”

When Lan Wangji and Wei Wuxian heard this, the former blushed even more, while the latter smirked and looked at his husband.

Lan Xichen is simply pleased to be there (although he did not want to hear all of that, thank you very much).

Lan Wangji argued, “Even if I am not a girl, you cannot lie on it.”

Seeing that he began to frown, Wei Wuxian energetically responded, “I’m not fooling around. You’re the one who should stop fooling around. I refuse to accept this, Lan Zhan. Tell me why?”

“Why what?”

“Of all the other people, there isn't anyone who doesn't secretly like me despite saying that I'm annoying,” Wei WuXian said, flipping around and lying stomach-down on the ground.

Everyone knew that the only person who didn't like Wei Wuxian was Yu Ziyuan, which is why they secretly sent her looks despite the fact that she noticed all of them. She wanted to say something, but she decided not to (not because she doesn't want to argue; she does, but

she remembered her husband's words and decided to keep her mouth shut for a moment). She will continue to keep her mouth shut until there is a scene that requires her to speak.

Some might be joyous inside because she did not initiate an argument, which Yu Ziyuan despises the most.

Wei Wuxian continues, “Why is it that, whenever it's you, you never give me any good looks? We count as having lived through death with each other, don't we? You don't even want to lend your lap for me to lie on and you're lecturing me again. Are you an old man or what?"

“You’re delirious,” Lan Wangji said with a thin voice.

Perhaps he was indeed delirious. Soon after, Wei Wuxian rolled over, his eyes fluttering shut as an unhealthy heat rose in his cheeks. Once he was too tired to notice what was going on around him, Lan Wangji approached and pulled Wei Wuxian's sleeping head onto his lap.

Madam Lan grinned. Despite her A-Zhan’s shyness and embarrassment, he placed Wei Wuxian's head on his lap to make him feel more comfortable.

From Wei Wuxian's perspective, his lying position wasn't too bad. It seemed that he really was lying on someone's lap. A cold hand rested over his forehead. It was very relaxing. He was able to roll around as much as he wanted because no one scolded him. When he rolled onto the ground, his head was gently stroked before being picked up and put onto the lap again.

“That’s sweet,” Madam Jin said, grinning widely. If only Jin Guangshan was this way, but he was not. Even if he is this sweet, his reputation as a womanizer and impregnating other women will make her sick to her stomach. She'd rather despise him and die than be in a romantic relationship with him.

“I agree with you, Madam Jin,” Cangse Sanren concurred with a fond look on her face.

Meanwhile, Qingheng-jun was relieved that his son had proven to be a better man than him. His love for the other was pure and innocent. He had not dragged and imprisoned Wei Wuxian, as he had done to their mother. Witnessing him falling in love, despite the unrequited love he felt at the time, was enough to relieve some of his guilt.

Wei Wuxian awoke two days later, still lying on the ground. The lap had been replaced by a pile of leaves behind his head, which felt slightly better than before. A distance away from him was Lan Wangji meditating. A fire had been started. The firelight reflected off his cheeks, making him appear jade, warm, and gentle.

Wei Wuxian thought to himself, *'Of course it was a dream.'*

"Wangji-xiongggg," Nie Huaisang whined loudly. "Why did you go away? You could've stayed in that position until Wei-xiong woke up!"

Despite his complaints and whining, he understood why Lan Wangji needed to distance himself from Wei Wuxian. Still, he wanted to watch the intimate scene for a little longer!

Lan Wangji wished for the same thing, but this is his younger self we're talking about, so it's not surprising.

"Ugh, it's so boring," Wei Wuxian complained. "It's really boring. It's too quiet! Lan Zhan, you're so boring!"

Lan Qiren, Nie Mingjue, and Jiang Fengmian sighed exasperatedly.

Jiang Wanyin scowled, "You just had a terrible fever and you're rolling around on the cave floor complaining like a baby!"

“Jiang Chenggg,” Wei Wuxian whined and pouted. “This is young Lan Zhan we're talking about. He doesn't talk unless it's absolutely necessary. I'm the only one who talks and talks, and all I ever hear in return is a pin drop of water and my breathing. Do you understand how bored I was at the time?” Wei Wuxian immediately remembered what he babbled and added, “No offense, my dear husband. You're completely different now.”

Lan Wangji only responded with an amused “Hmm.”

“He’s so much like you,” Wei Changze chuckled softly into his wife's ear. “So energetic.”

“That’s how it should be! I am his mother after all!” Cangse Sanren proudly responded and laughed.

“Quiet,” Lan Wangji commanded while meditating. “You’re still burning up. Don’t speak and conserve your strength.”

Having said that, Wei Wuxian's cheeks were still flushed from exhaustion and fever. That didn't stop him from ranting, though, “You won’t even talk to me or even look at me! You just sit there and meditate!”

“Duh,” Jin Zixuan replied as he rolled his eyes, “because that's what he needed to do to gather energy. Unlike someone who’s rolling around and complaining.”

“Are you picking up a fight with me, peacock?”

“No, I am merely stating facts.”

“Facts, my ass.”

Madam Jin and Lan Xichen both cleared their throats, causing the two to look at each other before looking away.

Jin Ling and Jiang Yanli were amused by the two.

“Why is still so hard? It must be because I am with you. Jiang Cheng should’ve stayed behind.”

While Jiang Wanyin agreed, Yu Ziyuan was vehemently opposed. Her son should be kept out of harm's way. Why is Wei Wuxian so desperate to keep dragging her son into all of his ridiculousness?

Wei Wuxian can clearly feel someone's eyes piercing him behind his back.

“Jiang Cheng! Where the hell are you! It’s almost seven days!

Lan Zhan's brows twitched in response to the other's loudness, but he didn't show any irritation and simply said, “Rest.”

Wei Wuxian curled up again, this time facing him and demanding, "Are you serious?! I just woke up and you’re telling me to rest again? Is it that you really can't stand me when I am awake?

“No. Never,” Lan Wangji blurted out before realizing he had just revealed his thoughts.

Wei Wuxian’s cheeks went red and laughed, “Be careful of your words, husband; you’re going to give me a heart attack.”

“Mn. Wei Ying’s heart is fragile and is mine. Shouldn’t give him a heart attack.”

‘Ugh,’ Wei Wuxian thought lovingly. *‘This man is too much for me.’*

“You are overthinking it,” Lan Wangji responded calmly.

Wei Wuxian covered his ears, “I'm sick. I'm feverish. Lan-er-gege, can't you say something nicer? And make poor, poor me feel better?”

“Leave the poor man alone, Wei Wuxian,” Mianmian said, sighing exasperatedly. Actually, she does feel sorry for Lan Wangji for having to deal with a menace for a week. It must’ve been both hard and thrilling for him.

“I am the poor man, Mianmian. I am the one who’s sick!” Wei Wuxian defends himself.

“He’s also dealing a menace like you, Wei-xiong. I do feel a bit sorry for him,” Nie Huaisang commented, hiding behind his fan.

Wei Wuxian rolled his eyes, “I hate all of you.”

Nothing came out of Lan Wangji's closed mouth, so Wei Wuxian continued, “You don't know what to say? Fine, I should've known. Then, if you don't know what to say, can you sing? How about you sing a song?”

It had originally been an offhand remark. He was chatting with Lan Wangji to pass the time and didn’t expect him to agree. Yet, after a few seconds of silence, Lan Wangji cleared his throat.

Everyone immediately sat upright as they stared at the young Lan Wangji in shock. Like what Wei Wuxian said, they did not expect him to agree easily, as they would have expected him to say something between *'ridiculous'* and a firm *'no'*. Yet here he is, grabbing the strings they previously used.

“This might be the first time I've heard Hanguang-jun sing,” Jingyi whispered, his eyes staring at the young Lan Wangji with both awe and disbelief.

“His voice must be beautiful!”

“Of course, this is Hanguang-jun we’re talking about.”

‘How come everyone has such high expectations of me?’ Lan Wangji thought, slightly embarrassed.

On the side, the Lan Family watched in anticipation. Wei Ying, on the other hand, had his eyes glued to the screen with love and affection. He is eager to hear his husband sing because he just missed out on the biggest thing that happened in the past. Right after asking for the name of the song (which he knew by now and still can't get over how cheesy and romantic the name is), he passed out.

Lan Wangji began with a few notes. Moments later, he began to sing.

The Lans are known not only for their guqin skills but also for their beautiful, soulful voices, which are rarely heard by the general public. However, Lan Wangji's voice was not particularly well-known (because he never really sang in public in the first place, but the people knew he had a beautiful voice).

The cultivators wholeheartedly agreed. Some people closed their eyes to bask in the beauty of the song. Lan Wangji’s ears turned red, embarrassed once again. The song he composed for his husband is now being played publicly.

Wei Ying, on the other hand, was feeling so much love in his heart that he was afraid it would burst.

‘How did I deserve this man?’ he pondered.

The notes flow smoothly, wrapping the audience in a warm blanket. It caressed their hearts, and revealed past hurts and struggles; it carried so much affection that left people drowning.

The emotions conveyed by the song had different meanings. Longing, comfort, and tranquillity...

And most of all... *Love.*

Sizhui recognized the song right away and turned to look at Lan Wangji and Wei Wuxian.

'This was the song he used to sing when—' he didn't finish the sentence as he clutched his chest, overcome by painful memories he refused to cry to.

"So beautiful."

"Hanguang-jun already recognized his feelings at that age and wrote a song for the object of his affection."

"It's quite sad that Wei Wuxian didn't realize Lan Wangji liked him at the time."

Yeah, Wei Wuxian mused, it's quite sad. But it was also because of that song that drew them closer together when he returned.

"Hey, Sizhui," Jingyi called out. "Wasn't this the song he played at Dafan Mountain?"

"Yes," he responded, his tone unusually quiet that Jingyi felt as if he did something wrong to him.

Lan Wangji's song continued, and Wei Wuxian finally relaxed enough to stop hiding his exhaustion. Hunger, cold, and exhaustion made him tremble slightly, but the song eventually lulled his feverish mind to sleep.

His face broke into a genuine smile, "It sounds nice. What's it called?"

Lan Wangji contemplated whether or not to respond, but in the end, he whispered, "Wangxian."

The cultivators gaped and turned to Lan Wangji. Did he just confess in front of Wei Wuxian? Because the reason for the song's title is so obvious that even a blind man would understand it.

"Wow, you're a total simp," Jiang Wanyin commented, refusing to look Lan Wangji in the eyes.

Despite the overwhelming affection that washed over him, Wei Wuxian smiled smugly and said, "I know right?"

However, from Wei Wuxian's perspective, he did not hear him, and he couldn't focus well enough to pay attention to what the other had said before passing out from exhaustion.

The screen then darkened.

Now Lan Wangji understands. It wasn't because Wei Ying had forgotten the song's name, but because he didn't hear him properly. And to think he'd blame him for forgetting.

"I'm sorry."

Confused, Wei Wuxian asked, “Huh? For what?”

“For blaming you for the things you don't recall.”

Wei Wuxian blinked and laughed, “"Aiya, Hanguang-jun, it's fine, and besides, I do have a fish of a brain sometimes.”

Lan Wangji immediately frowned, not pleased with the response, “Wei Ying does not have the brain of a fish. Wei Ying is astute.”

“Well, yeah…perhaps?”

Alright, Lan Wangji cannot accept this. He needs his husband to know and remember that he is more than what he used to describe himself to be, and he will have to express this every time, no matter how much his husband chastises him for being careless with his heart.

The light returned, and Wei Wuxian slowly opened his tired eyes from his slumber on a bed. The first thing he noticed was a shelf with textbooks and a poster depicting two people kissing and a person scaring away a dog.

“He’s back!” Jiang Yanli exclaimed, relief washing over her. Her shoulders dropped as if she had been carrying a heavy weight for some time.

“Oh thank god,” Cangse Sanren sighed, relieved, and finally relaxed into her seat, leaning closer to her husband, who is now smiling at their younger son on the screen.

When Wei Wuxian moved his eyes to the side, a person was sitting next to him. It was Jiang Yanli.

“A-Niang!” Jin Ling exclaimed, delighted to see the younger version of his mother. Even Jin Zixuan couldn't help but smile when he saw his lovely wife on the screen.

Then, Jiang Yanli's eyes lit up, noticing that her brother is now gaining consciousness.

"A-Xian," she said, leaning closer. "You're awake!"

"Shijie?" he asked, still in disbelief. He was still processing the fact that he was back at Lotus Pier and that his sister was right next to her.

Now that they're getting a good view of Wei Wuxian, it's easy for them to make out the dark circles under his eyes. Despite the fact that his golden core had allowed him to recover from the fever, both he and his core were exhausted. He obviously needed more time to recover.

"Poor, Senior Wei," Zizhen muttered sadly.

"How were they even rescued?" A Jiang disciple wondered. "That cave they were trapped in was clearly near Wen territory; did the Yunmeng Jiang sneak in or attack the Wens?"

"Attacking the Wens is out of the question," Sizhui stated, his brow furrowed. "That reckless move alone would be the inception of a war, so my guess is that they sneaked in."

"From what I've seen so far, the Wen Territories are heavily guarded," a Nie Disciple observed. "But if that's what the Yunmeng Jiang Sect did, they did a good job sneaking in."

"I highly doubt that they did that," a Jin disciple chimed in. "The previous Jiang Sect Leader may have requested the chief cultivator's audience after he—"

"Young Lan Sizhui is correct. A-Cheng led the rescue, and with the help of Lanling Jin, they successfully sneaked into Wen's territory." Jiang Fengmian interjected after hearing the disciples talk.

“Lanling Jin?” Jin Ling wondered, then turned to face his father. “You participated in the rescue, A-Die?”

“I did,” Jin Zixuan responded with a frown. “Qinghe and Gusu, who have been the clans closest to Yunmeng, were taken over Wen Clan.”

Hearing that, Nie Mingjue's blood began to boil. Having insufficient manpower to defend his sect in the past was humiliating for him as a sect leader. Nie Huaisang even felt sorry for his older brother and the fact that he had made no contribution to defending his own sect.

Jin Zixuan continued, “So Yunmeng Jiang Sect cannot ask for their assistance in rescuing Lan Wangji and Wei Wuxian; that's why they asked Lanling Jin for help.”

“Oh, I do remember that,” Madam Jin said, smiling at his grandson. “Your father was brave for once. He showed his support for Yunmeng Jiang in front of his father, insisting on fighting with Wen Clan.”

“I guess Jin-xiong has a strong sense of justice as well. How surprising,” Nie Huaisang teased, causing the said man’s brows to twitch.

Jin Ling returned his gaze to his father, his eyes gleaming with awe and admiration. Even Jiang Yanli appeared surprised, but quickly recovered and smiled, feeling a little proud of her husband's persistence and bravery.

“But how did they sneak in? They could’ve been caught if the Wen disciples were around the area,” Jingyi wondered.

“The Wen Clan was up to something,” Jin Zixuan answered. “They sent Wen Chao and Wen Xu out, ostensibly to look for something, which allowed us to easily sneak in and get Wei Wuxian and Lan Wangji out of the cave.”

Jin Zixuan, who is well-known for arrogance, now has a number of disciples who admire him.

“I haven’t thanked you enough, peacock,” Wei Wuxian said, stepping in as well as Jiang Wanyin, who was crossing his arms and looking a bit hesitant to face him.

“Please don’t. Both of you thanking me is already making my hair stand on end.”

Madam Jin gave Yu Ziyuan a sidelong glance as if expecting her to speak or at least express her gratitude, but since it was Wei Wuxian who was saved by Lanling Jin and not her biological son, she doesn't give a damn. The lengths Yunmeng and Lanling Jin went to save her disciple and Lan Wangji…

‘Tch, how did I have a friend this ungrateful?’

“Am I…” Wei Wuxian trailed off, realizing he was no longer in the cave, “back home?”

“You are now, Wei-gongzi,” Lan Xichen agreed, feeling a little happy for the man, if not for the fact that he was missing at the time and that his younger brother had to deal with a lot without him. He turned towards his brother and imagined a picture of a defeated Lan Zhan desperately searching for his older brother, and it made his heart ache.

“Don’t move,” Jiang Yanli advised. “You’ve been in a coma for three days and nights. Fortunately, A-Cheng found you in time.”

As soon as Jiang Yanli finished explaining, panic instantly sank in.

“Where’s Lan Zhan?!” he demanded, immediately sitting up. A second later, he curled in on himself, wincing in pain and clutching the spot where Wang Lingjiao had sealed the Wen brand onto his skin.

Lan Wangji's heart stuttered as he saw his husband ask about him, but the feeling quickly faded after seeing him wincing in pain.

Meanwhile, Jiang Wanyin was secretly feeling jealous again, but quickly suppressed it, knowing it was pointless to feel that way right now. Wei Wuxian, like Lan Wangji, had been in love with Lan Wangji from the beginning; he just didn't realize it. It's natural for his brother to be concerned about him first.

Right after Jiang Yanli sat close to hold him, Wei Wuxian asked frantically, "Where is Jiang Cheng?"

"Hah! And now you're asking about Jiang Cheng after you've already asked about Lan Wangji?" Yu Ziyuan hissed. "The right question to ask is whether A-Cheng returned alive and well!"

"Look, the matter of which person Wei Wuxian is looking for right after he wakes up does not matter," Nie Mingjue said, having had enough of her temper. It was really a lot worse than his.

"Right, the most important thing here is that they returned to the sects safely," Song Lan added, his face unusually composed yet irritated.

"San-niang, they're is right," Jiang Fengmian concurred. "A-Cheng—"

"What are you saying?" Yu Ziyuan scowled. "Without his sword, A-Cheng had to walk for miles to return home, suffering just as much as Wei Wuxian, and yet you're saying they're right that it doesn't matter who that brat is looking for?!"

'Yeah, it doesn't really matter anymore, A-Niang,' Jiang Wanyin thought with resignation.

"There's no need to be furious about this, Yu-furen," Madam Lan interrupted, her usual serene expression long gone. "However, I must remind you that my son nearly died, and it is

no surprise that Wei Wuxian worries about him first."

Now, this might be the first time Madam Lan speaks directly to her. Yu Ziyuan harbors no ill will toward her because she has only heard rumors about her and Qingheng-jun and knows nothing about her. And yet, here she is, expressing her irritation.

"Then what? My son didn't nearly die as well?" Yu Ziyuan retorted.

"My wife meant that—"

"Resolve your problems later or I will discontinue the memory," Baoshan Sanren said, preventing Qingheng-jun from further provoking the other.

The wooden door opened. Jiang Wanyin came in with a white porcelain jar hanging from his hand, his voice harsh, "What are you shouting for? Think your injury isn't that serious huh? If I knew you'd be like this, I'd have left you in Mt. Muxi."

"He's hurt," Wen Qing scowled as she pointed it out. Cangse Sanren shared the same sentiment. Both women knew Jiang Wanyin was joking, but the statement was too vexing to ignore. He's still hurt, but he didn't need any reprimands for the day.

Jiang Wanyin immediately apologized to the two women and bowed his head so lowly that Yu Ziyuan was irritated once more because how dare his son bow his head to a Wen dog and a rogue cultivator? But Jiang Fengmian intervened and stopped her.

Really, it's difficult to reason with his wife. At this point, she might not have the heart to change at all. Will their relationship be the same as it was in their previous lives? Will they continue to clash and ignore one another? Just the thought of it makes Jiang Fengmian's mind go insane. He really needs to fix their relationship, but where should he start?

The smile Wei Wuxian had ever since his brother's arrival was then replaced with a pout, "You punk, come here!"

Jiang Wanyin turned to him, raising a brow and asking, “What? You’re going to kneel down to thank me?”

“You took so long to bring help.”

“You are complaining?” Yu Ziyuan asked, displeased that his son’s efforts were not appreciated enough. It would have been preferable if his son had simply left him there. It doesn't matter if Gusu Lan is the one to save him; at the very least, her son will be spared from all the trouble.

“A-Niang, A-Xian is just joking,” Jiang Yanli responded calmly, but her tone had an edge that only Wei Wuxian and Jiang Wanyin noticed.

“It does not look like a joke to me.”

“Why do you always try to provoke my son for the smallest things he's said and done?” Cangse Sanren scowled. “He is just a child; it’s normal for him to fool around.”

Yu Ziyuan smirked and looked at Lan Qiren, “Tell that to him.”

Lan Qiren gave her a sidelong glance as his name was brought up in the conversation. If not for his restraint, he might’ve glared at her. He had been silent for a while, trying to process everything that had happened, when he was suddenly pointed at.

Lan Qiren could even feel Cangse Sanren’s piercing gaze on him. It was as if he expected him to say something, yet he refused to say a word to alleviate the tension between the two women.

Because of his silence, Yu Ziyuan scoffed and decided to drop the argument

Wei Wuxian then added, “Trying to leave me for dead? The journey from Mt. Muxi to Yunmeng takes no more than five days.”

“Are you dumb? Only counting the time back?! We need to dig open the blocked cave,” Jiang Wanyin grumbled. “Be grateful that we got you out in seven days.”

“Seems like it.”

Jiang Yanli sat down with the bowl of soup in her hands, interrupting, “Alright, stop bickering now. Eat something first.”

Cangse Sanren and Wei Changze were grateful that Jiang Yanli did not develop the same personality as her mother and adored their son. They wouldn't know what to do if the Jiang family didn't have one person who didn't care about their son at all.

Wei Changze turned to Jiang Yanli and smiled, expressing his appreciation. Jiang Yanli returned the smile and nodded.

Jiang Yanli handed Wei Wuxian a bowl of lotus and pork rib soup, making him beam brighter.

“Thank you, Shijie!”

Jiang Wanyin, who was watching his siblings, averted his gaze, but when he noticed Jiang Yanli helping Wei Wuxian eat, he glared and snapped, “Don’t you have hands yourself?”

“A-Cheng’s right, A-Li,” Madam Yu sneered. “You should not do such things for him; you are not his maid.”

“Yu-Furen, he’s still hurt,” Lan Xichen said, his expression calm and composed, but the way he pointed it out annoyed Yu Ziyuan.

“His hands are not severed,” Yu Ziyuan retorted. “He can eat on his own—”

“That was my choice to help him eat, A-Niang,” Jiang Yanli interjected, who was displeased by her mother’s statement and response. “You don’t have to tell me what I should and shouldn’t do from now on.”

Looking at Yu Ziyuan’s stunned expression, Jin Zixuan and Jin Ling would say they’re proud of her for speaking up.

Yu Ziyuan then turned to her husband, “Jiang Fengmian, are you not going to say anything?!”

“There’s no need for me to say something,” Jiang Fengmian responded plainly. “A-Li can do whatever she wants.”

Yu Ziyuan cannot believe this. He is hoping that their relationship will improve? That he would go to any length to reconcile and start over?

‘Jiang Fengmian, until now you are still a hypocrite.’

Jiang Yanli wiped Wei Wuxian's mouth and chin before standing up, and Wei Wuxian smirked before he stuck his tongue out childishly at his brother.

“Oh, you’re asking for it!” Jiang Cheng exclaimed and went to strangle Wei Wuxian.

Jiang Yanli laughed as she stood up to leave the room, saying, “I’ll go tell Dad.”

Wei Wuxian struggled, yelling, “Stop, stop!”

Some cultivators were relieved to see these brothers together again and to see them acting like this. The memory from earlier really made them emotionally stressed.

“I hope this continues,” a female cultivator said, smiling as she stared at the screen.

“Yeah,” her friend responded, but then her expression turned solemn. “Now that he's back at Lotus Pier, I'm hoping I don't see anything quarrelsome happening.”

“I agree,” a young man piped in. “I’m getting tired of listening to their shit.”

Hearing their conversation, Wei Wuxian and Jiang Wanyin wanted to laugh bitterly. What they hoped would never come true because more chaos and quarreling were going to happen soon.

“You deserved to get hurt!” Jiang Wanyin declared. “You knew it was the tortoise of carnage, but you tried to kill it anyway; are you courting death?!”

“Did I have other options?” Wei Wuxian asked bitterly of his brother. “Wait for death? I hate that shelled bastard; it actually crushed the hole.” Then, as if remembering something,, he asked, “Oh right, how’s Lan Zhan?”

“Wei-xiong and his priorities,” Nie Huaisang teased as he fanned himself. “Sometimes, I envy you, Wangji-xiong. Wei-xiong rarely worries about me.”

Lan Wangji preferred it that way.

“Was his brother found?” Wei Wuxian added.

Jiang Wanyin let go of his brother and sat next to him, responding, “Lan Wangji is back in Gusu. Lan Xichen, on the other hand, most likely went into hiding with salvaged ancient books and music scores.”

Most of the Lan Clan turned to look at Lan Xichen. Just where did the first jade go that even the enemy couldn't find him?

“A-Huan,” Qingheng-jun paused, unsure if he had the right to ask, but his son's gaze was fixed on him as if waiting for him to speak, so he inquired, “Were you okay that time you were hiding?”

“Yes, Father,” Lan Xichen said with a smile, “although I hate to admit it and even more so to remember it, someone helped me.”

The cultivators are already suspecting that the one who helped him was Jin Guangyao.

“What about Clan Leader Lan?” Wei Wuxian asked.

“He passed away.”

It's strange to hear that Clan Leader Lan has passed away when he's right here with them, alive and well.

Meanwhile, Qinghengjun was wearing a sad expression on his face. Perhaps he did deserve to die for all of his past sins, as well as failing to be the sect leader that the clan and his brother desired. Not only is he a terrible brother and husband, but he is also a terrible father. However, he also believes that he did not deserve to die at that time because of the sins he had to atone for and suffer for, but what’s done is done. He already tried and failed.

At this point, he is left wondering why the immortal is allowing him to live in this time.

Because of his brother's response, Wei Wuxian's eyes widened in shock.

"Father is almost gone. Brother is missing."

"I-I see."

Then, the memory changed as the Qing Qi drums were beaten furiously and loudly, and the Nightless City came into view. In the center of the courtyard, the Xuanwu of Slaughter's shell towered over everything else.

A-Qing frowned, "Why is that thing in there? Don't tell me.."

"Young Master of Wen is supreme in formidable arts," the Wen disciples chanted and cheered together. "Purging evil for the benefit of people. Your merits can live on for thousands of years!"

"He barely did anything to kill that thing," Mianmian hissed, enraged that he was being praised in this matter. "By what right did he deserve such high praise?"

"Yeah!" Jingyi yelled. "It was Hanguang-jun and Senior Wei who killed it!"

"Nah," Wei Wuxian objected. "It was Lan Zhan who killed it.

"No, it was Wei—"

"It does not matter!" Jingyi and Mianmian chorused.

"Father," Wen Chao began as he kneeled down, "You'll never imagine that in Mt. Muxi, the four clans of Lan, Jiang, Jin, and Nie started a rebellion headed by a Jiang. What

audacity!”

“What?!” Madam Jin and Lan Qiren exclaimed.

“How fucking dare you?!” raged Nie Mingjue, his fists clenched so tightly that Nie Huaisang was afraid his bones would break. “You tried to use live bait; you ordered the death of everyone in the Lan and Jin clan, ran away and sealed off one of the cave's only exits, and then claimed you were the one who killed it?! You're taking credit for someone else's work you barely contributed!”

“And what rebellion are you talking about, fucking brat?” Yu Ziyuan yelled indignantly. “If there was anyone who led a rebellion, it would be none other than you!”

Wen Chao went on, “Fortunately, I lived up to all expectations and severed the beast’s head to present it to Father.”

After he finished explaining, the look he got in return from his Father was more than a little skeptical, “Is that so?”

Wen Ruohan's reaction satisfied them because the explanation was the most unbelievable thing they'd ever heard.

“It’s funny how Wen Rouhan doubts his own son as well,” Song Lan remarked. “He really knows his son, doesn’t he?”

Wei Wuxian nearly rolled out of bed when he heard that, exclaiming, “What?! Wen Chao said *he* killed it?”

Yeah, with Wei Wuxian’s exclamation, they agreed wholeheartedly. Wen Chao was truly shameless.

Lan Xichen shakes his head, expressing his disbelief, “Was he really not worried about the consequences of his own words?”

“What is there to worry about?” Jiang Wanyin retorted. “If he dies at the hands of Wen Ruohan for lying, then that’s hardly a problem.”

“Yeah,” Jiang Wanyin told him. “The damned Wens are celebrating in Nightless City.”

“That shameless bastard,” Wei Wuxian sneered. “Lan Zhan was clearly the one who killed it!”

“Is that so?” another voice asked, and Jiang Fengmian entered the room. “Coincidentally, Lan-er-gongzi told me you were the one who killed it.”

Madam Jin rolled her eyes, “Why are you two pointing fingers at each other? Both of you killed it.”

Jiang Yanli smiled as she nodded, “Madam Jin is right. Lan-er-gongzi, despite his injury, used the assassination chord technique and decapitated the monster's neck. A-Xian lured it out and speared through the old wound from the inside. Both strategies were dangerous, but both were effective in killing it, so it's safe to say that both of you killed it.”

Lan Wangji and Wei Wuxian exchanged glances and chuckled, “Alright, we both did kill it.”

“A-Die,” Jiang Cheng greeted as he stood up and saluted at his father.

“Jiang-Shushu!” Wei Wuxian lit up and moved to sit up, but Jiang Fengmian raised his hand.

“Sitting is fine,” he assured. The words brightened Wei Wuxian's smile even more, while Jiang Cheng went to pour his father tea.

Jiang Fengmian had never paid attention before, but as his son turned his back, he noticed a frown on his face. He smiled as he greeted Wei Wuxian, but he barely looked at his son. Was he really demonstrating his preference for Wei Wuxian over his own son in this way? Had he finally grasped what his wife was saying? But at the time, he was more concerned about Wei Wuxian's injuries, but his son had already recovered, so he paid more attention to him as he explained what had happened.

Perhaps now is the time to examine and reflect on his actions, from how he treated Wei Wuxian to how he treated A-Cheng.

“So, who was it, really?” Jiang Fengmian asked as he sat down next to Wei Wuxian.

Wei Wuxian scratched his neck as he responded, “I guess both of us did something. But he was the main one. I only went into the beast’s shell and chased it out. Lan Zhan was waiting for it alone outside. It only died after it dragged on for six entire hours.”

The cultivators gaped in disbelief, “Six..”

Was the memory so quick that the battle between the beast and the two disciples seemed to last an hour? Or was there a time skip?

"Okay, that’s not the case here," Madam Lan interjected. "Wei Wuxian, why are you refusing to admit that you—" She did not finish her sentence when the realization came upon her while Wei Wuxian stared at her in confusion.

Was it because he grew up in a harsh environment and was abused that he couldn't be selfish, even if he wanted to take credit for something he did? Or perhaps he's just shy of receiving compliments or praise from others. Both options made sense, but the first appeared to be more likely.

“What was it that you wanted to say, Yuèmǔ?” Wei Wuxian inquired, but Madam Lan only smiled half-heartedly and shook her head.

“Nothing.”

Jiang Wanyin turned around to express his agreement, “Since you killed it together, what's yours is yours; why give him all the credit?”

Some cultivators nodded resolutely. Both played their parts well.

“I didn’t,” Wei Wuxian answered as Jiang Fengmian accepted the cup his son had handed him. “Just that compared to him. I didn’t contribute much.”

And because of this, a lot of the cultivators glared at Wei Wuxian because what the hell? Why is he this way? He used to brag about being the best at catching peasants and dragging a water ghoul out of the water to kill it, but how come he doesn't give himself more credit for killing a legendary creature?

Wei Wuxian felt their glares and chuckled sheepishly. His self-esteem is truly fucked up, but it's simply difficult for him to take credit for something he barely contributed to.

“Wei Ying,” Lan Wangji called, his frown deepening. “Stop it.”

Ah, his husband must have sensed it again.

“Okay.”

Jiang Fengmian hummed once and responded, “Well done.”

Wei Changze was displeased by that praise, so he glared at his old friend and scowled, “My son was able to kill a four-hundred-year-old beast at the mere age of seventeen. He deserved more than a simple *‘Well done’*, Jiang Fengmian.”

Jiang Fengmian had no say in the matter. He struggles to express himself, and he knows Wei Wuxian deserved more than what he just said, having witnessed the struggle firsthand; most were taken aback by the understatement.

“Father, it’s alright,” Wei Wuxian assured as he smiled at his father, but both his parents knew that his smile was quite fake.

Yu Ziyuan, on the other hand, was enraged. That's precisely what she meant! His favoritism is on display right now, letting everyone know that, despite being an heir, Jiang Wanyin is being treated very differently than the other by his own father.

Jin Ling knows he shouldn't read too much into the scene, but his younger uncle's expression was so off when his grandfather congratulated Wei Wuxian. He will not despise Wei Wuxian because he is not the source of the problem, but rather his grandfather. He didn't even look at his uncle, let alone congratulate him on his survival and leading the rescue of Wei Wuxian and Lan Wangji.

Jin Ling concealed his anger and disappointment, *‘This is so fucked up.’*

Jiang Wanyin froze, but then he quickly recovered and added, “You slayed the Xuanwu of Slaughter before you hit adulthood. Congratulations.”

The frustration from the Young Jiang Wanyin was as clear as day. Jiang Fengmian turned to his son, who was now older, taller, and more mature. He should've said something, anything, to alleviate his son’s frustration and insecurities, but instead sat there, sipping the tea his son had served him.

Jiang Wanyin became aware of his father's gaze on his back. He knew his father's thoughts were conflicted right now, but he didn't want to hear him say *‘I'm sorry’*. He desired his comfort, proper guidance, and, most importantly, his love. Though it was very difficult to ask his father this, so he’d rather shut his mouth, like he always does.

Seeing how he folded his hands and raised his brows, Wei Wuxian knew that those sour feelings were at him again.

And just the way Jiang Wanyin's congratulations sounded quite strange, Jiang Yanli and Yu Ziyuan knew immediately.

He must be making a fuss in silence, defiantly asking himself, wondering why he wasn't the one who stayed in the cave to kill the beast, and how, if it had been him, he could have done this and that.

Although Yu Ziyuan was enraged that her husband congratulated Wei Wuxian rather than their own son (he traveled miles and returned to Lotus Pier in one piece, Jiang Fengmian! At least appreciate A-Cheng's efforts!), and how she knew the questions his son had in mind, she very much preferred having her son safe and alive than him suffering and dying in that cave fighting that damn tortoise.

Wei Wuxian laughed and responded, "What a pity that you weren't there as well, or else, you'd be able to share some of that credit as well. You'd also be able to chat with me and chase the boredom away. Good Heavens, sitting face-to-face with Lan Zhan these days almost bored me to death."

Jiang Wanyin glared at his brother. Being read so easily by him made him feel uneasy, but not in a bad way; it felt more like he had revealed all his insecurities to him and received a comforting smile in return.

On the side, Wei Wuxian sheepishly laughed again and turned to face his husband, "I did not mean that! Lan Zhan is not boring!"

Lan Zhan simply hummed in response, amused.

"You deserved it," Jiang Wanyin responded, glaring at his brother. "You shouldn't have played the hero."

Wei Changze and Cangse Sanren both frowned. To some extent, putting yourself in danger to help others and being willing to die is something of a cultivator thing—a hero thing in general, but at this point, it made no sense to them as to why Jiang Wanyin is so upset about this. Perhaps he is worried about their son, which is completely understandable; anyone would be worried, but he didn't have to say it that way.

There was no time to waste earlier; they needed to do something to escape and survive. Their son was the one who acted quickly and took charge of everything. His first go-to solution is to throw himself into danger to save not only himself but everyone else as well. He did more than just *'playing the hero'*.

Who knows what would have happened if he hadn't acted sooner? Who knows if they'll be able to survive being in the same space as that creature?

"I deeply apologize," Jiang Wanyin said, lowly bowing his head, which surprised both Cangse Sanren and Wei Changze, but they quickly recovered.

Wei Wuxian awkwardly laughed and reassured, "Aiyahh, Jiang Cheng, it's al—"

"Playing the hero or being a hero is a cultivator thing," Wei Changze interrupted solemnly, cutting off his son. "I hope you don't perceive it as a weakness," Wei Changze then shot him a glance, "but as a strength, one should have."

"Yes, of course," Jiang Wanyin replied, embarrassed and humiliated, but he knows he deserved it, and he will soon deserve a lot more humiliating words.

'Jiang Wanyin,' Cangse Sanren at the boy intently. *'You truly are Yu Ziyuan's son.'*

"You shouldn't have cared for such a hell of a thing. If in the beginning you didn't—"

"Jiang Cheng," Jiang Fengmian sternly interrupted.

Some of them were quite displeased by Jiang Wanyin's words. His words were almost implying that Wei Wuxian shouldn't have saved the others from the Wens.

Jiang Wanyin immediately quieted down, realizing he had said too much, and Jiang Fengmian turned to face him.

His expression didn't look as if he was blaming his son for anything, but it did turn from calm to more solemn as he said, "Do you know in which ways what you just said is not appropriate?"

Jiang Cheng's head hung low as he muttered, "Yes."

"You are out of your mind, Jiang Fengmian," Yu Ziyuan hissed. ""You congratulate Wei Wuxian, but you got upset when your son stated facts?"

"What the hell do you mean by speaking facts?" Madam Jin interrupted furiously. "Are you saying that Wei Wuxian was wrong for *'caring for such a hell of a thing'* and saving his peers? That he '*shouldn't have played the hero"*?"

Jiang Wanyin flinched.

Yu Ziyuan smirked, "Using my son's words on me? Fine, I'll tell you. It's that damn hero complex of his that caused a lot of trouble at Lotus Pier. For instance, the Wens attacked Lotus Pier."

Wei Wuxian flinched.

"The Wens would've attacked the clans either way with the excuse that the other clans are rebelling," Cangse Sanren hissed, standing up at once. "So stop blaming everything on my son!"

“Blaming him? I am mere—”

“Yu Ziyuan!” Jiang Fengmian exclaimed as he tightly gripped his wife's wrist. “Stop this! You are accusing Wei Ying of something he had no fault for!”

“He’s just angry and speaking without care,” Wei Wuxian interjected.

Wei Wuxian’s were ignored. Seeing how Jiang Wanyin’s mouth and heart were still at odds, how he still felt defiant, Jiang Fengmian shook his head, “A-Cheng, some words cannot be spoken frivolously.”

Lan Qiren gave a nod. With his harsh and sharp mouth, he’d have to keep his emotions under control. Being an emotional leader surrounded by harsh and corrupt sect leaders would not help him at all. Worse, it could spark a clan conflict.

“If you say it, it means that you have not understood the Jiang Clan’s motto—”

Like a bolt of lightning, Yu Ziyuan stormed inside the room, bringing in with her a cold breeze, “Yes, he doesn’t understand. But what does it matter, as long as Wei Ying understands? *‘To attempt the impossible.’* It’s exactly how he is, isn’t it?”

Jiang Yanli, with her years of experience with such things, knew exactly what was going to happen. It was already bad enough to see her parents fight every time they were in the same space, but their fights got worse and worse. Everyone would now get to see the worst of their relationship firsthand.

Standing directly before Wei Wuxian’s bed, she raised her brows as she added, “Knowing that it’d bring trouble to our clan, he still can’t help but fool around!”

Stunned, Wei Changze turned to her and repeated, “Fooling around?’ his face darkening with each second. “My son, who sacrificed himself, saved most of the disciples, including Lan Wangji, and killed the Xuanwu of Slaughter, was merely fooling around?!”

“Wei Changze,” Jiang Fengmian interrupted. “This is a private family matter. I would advise against thinking about it too deeply—”

“A family matter?” Cangse Sanren repeated, a dangerous smirk forming on her lips. “In what way was my son a part of your family? And why do you think we wouldn't think about it too much?”

Worried, Wei Wuxian stepped in between his parents and the Jiangs, “Mother, Father, please stop. I really was a fool—”

“You are not!” Lan Wangji exclaimed as he approached his husband and his parents. “Wei Ying embraced the Jiang Sect’s motto proudly. That is more than just fooling around.”

Yu Ziyuan wanted to laugh. Wei Wuxian, who now has people who care about him and defend him from others, including her, makes her even angrier than before because why can't they see her point?!

“One day, he’ll definitely get our clan into serious trouble!”

Wei Wuxian flinched slightly, his bright smile had faded as he looked down.

Jin Ling and Sizhui wished to approach the young Wei Wuxian and comfort him. He has only recently recovered, and this is what he sees when he awakens. It must’ve been tiring. Day and night, being criticized and abused physically and emotionally, they wondered how Wei Wuxian was still able to smile brightly and act mischievously around others as if he did not face a storm along the way.

“San-niang,” Jiang Fengmian spoke. “What are you doing here?”

Yu Ziyuan viciously answered, “What am I doing here? What a joke that I am asked of such a thing! Jiang Fengmian, do you still remember that I’m also the leader of Lotus Pier? Do you still remember every inch of the earth here is my territory? Do you still remember, between the one lying there and the one standing here, which one is your son?!”

“San-niang, that is not—”

“What? Am I wrong?”

“No, but—”

“Then, don’t say anything further!”

Most of the cultivators sighed tiredly. Will they have to endure another tirade between these two?

Such inquiries he had heard numerous times over the years, and Jiang Fengmian responded, “Of course I do.”

As a result, Yu Ziyuan laughed bitterly, “You do remember, but there’s no use if you simply remember. Wei Ying, he really can’t take it unless he stirs up some trouble, can he?”

‘You’d nagged him even if he hadn’t stirred trouble,’ Nie Huaisang thought pensively. *‘Everything he does, you can’t tolerate it. What a woman you are, Madam Yu.’*

“If I had known, I would’ve made him stay in Lotus Pier properly and not go outside. Could Wen Chao really have dared to do anything to the two young masters of the Gusu

Lan and the Lanling Jin Sect? Even if he did, it'd mean that they ran out of luck. Since when was it your turn to play the hero?"

"Yu Ziyuan!" Madam Jin exclaimed incredulously, turning to face her friend with shock written across her face. "Are you saying that my son should've died for the sin of trying to do the right thing?!"

"If Jin Zixuan brings down the Wens on your sect, that's his problem," Yu Ziyuan responded, annoyed at the accusation. "But if Wei Wuxian—"

"There you go again, dragging my son's name every time you open your damn mouth!" Cangse Sanren cursed.

"Pardon me for interrupting, but Madam Yu, are you so afraid of the Wens that you'd rather blame a child who did nothing in the first place?" Nie Mingjue queried, making Yu Ziyuan tremble even more in anger.

While they're at it, the cultivators were still angry and disappointed, but unsurprised that Jiang Wanyin thought Wei Wuxian's actions were wrong despite the fact that they were entirely righteous. They were never wrong about where his mindset came from.

In front of Jiang Fengmian, Wei Wuxian had to give the madam some face. He didn't protest at all, though he thought to himself, *'He wouldn't have dared to do anything to them? That's not for certain.'*

And he was right. Wen Chao wouldn't care if they were a clan heir or not; he'd still lay a hand on them. Even remembering how Lan Wangji and Jin Zixuan saved Mianmian from becoming a live bait would have been enough to provoke him.

Yu Ziyuan glared at Wei Wuxian's back. Lan Wangji, noticing her eyes, moved to cover his husband and returned the glare, causing Yu Ziyuan to scoff and turn away.

“I’m saying this right now,” Yu Ziyuan continued. “One day, he’ll definitely get our sect into some big trouble!”

Not wanting to have this conversation in front of the kids, Jiang Fengmian stood up, “Let’s talk when we get back.”

“Talk about what? Get back to where?” Yu Ziyuan demanded. “I’ll be talking about it right here. I have nothing to be ashamed of, anyways!” She grabbed her son’s shoulder and pulled him in front of her and pushed him forward for Jiang Fengmian to see, shouting, “Look at him! This one is your own flesh and blood!”

Jiang Wanyin turned away from his father to stare somewhere with a wince.

Wen Qing felt sorry for the man. Jiang Wanyin wasn't entirely bad; he just had a deep inferiority complex due to his father's preference for Wei Wuxian and his mother's constant reminders that his cultivation was inferior to Wei Wuxian's. If he had only grown up in a good environment, with someone who would not dismiss him for what he is capable of...

“I also think he’s not that bad,” Wen Ning said with a solemn look on his face. He must’ve known what she was thinking at the moment. “I know now. I know now why he’s like that.”

“Poor, Sect Leader Jiang,” a young man murmured, “The frustration he felt at the moment must be so intense.”

“Even if you dislike him just because I’m the one who gave birth to him, he still has your surname!”

Wei Wuxian stared at his brother with a concerned look.

“As if he'd forgotten his own son,” a female cultivator muttered.

“Yeah,” her friend concurred. “Naturally, he is harsher on Jiang Wanyin because he is expected to be the sect's future leader, and he is not yet ready. Wei Wuxian, on the other hand, is already extremely talented and has exceeded everyone's expectations; thus, he appears cocky; however, there is literally no reason to expect more from him, as he is nothing more than Jiang Wanyin's right arm.

“Facts,” another one of their friends piped in. “Like I get where she’s coming from, but she didn't need to point out who his real son is because he already knows.”

Yu Ziyuan continued, “I don’t believe for a second that you haven’t heard of how the outsider’s gossip. They say that even after so many years, Sect Leader Jiang still holds feelings for a certain ‘Sanren’ regarding the son of his old friends as a son of his own. They are speculating if Wei Ying is your son.”

“What?” Cangse Sanren, stunned, turned to Jiang Fengmian.

There were more cultivators in the room who were at a loss for words. Knowing about the rumors was one thing, but hearing them from Yu Ziyuan's mouth was quite another. It almost sounded like it was true.

The real Jiang Fengmian averted his gaze. No one should see this, not even his old friend. This was a personal matter, and the rumors were false. He's already talked about it with his wife.

“Jiang Fengmian?” Wei Changze inquired as if asking him to explain. Yu Ziyuan expects him to deny it as well.

“It’s true that I’ve harbored feelings for Cangse Sanren,” he admitted, sighing deeply before continuing, “but Wei Ying is not mine by blood; I do see him as my son by heart.”

Wei Changze frowned at his old friend. Although he had previously speculated that he had feelings for his wife, hearing confirmation from him was strange. It's no surprise Yu Ziyuan was envious. Had Jiang Fengmian brought their son to Lotus Pier because of his wife?

An unknown cultivator sighed, “God, I need some space from this family drama.”

Outraged, Jiang Fengmian shouted, “Yu Ziyuan!”

“Jiang Fengmian!” Yu Ziyuan shouted as well. “Do you think that anything will change just because you raised your voice?! Do you think that I don’t know you?!”

Jiang Fengmian’s expression darkened even more.

Jiang Wanyin and Jiang Yanli sighed. They couldn't help but wonder if their previous relationship would have been better if they had simply listened to and understood each other. But even if it did, it was possible that Wei Wuxian had already left Lotus Pier, or that even if he did, they would still clash because they were incompatible in the beginning.

Unwilling to speak anymore, Jiang Fengmian stood up and walked out of the room.

Still not having enough, Yu Ziyuan demanded, “Jiang Fengmian, why are you walking away?! Feeling guilty?! Cangse Sanren and your servant Wei Changze were meant for each other. It’s a fact whether you accept it or not!”

After the argument, there was an unbreakable silence; no one dared to express their own opinions, which Wei Wuxian was grateful for. He did not want to hear any more of this.

Meanwhile, Cangse Sanren stared intently at the screen. She didn't mind being the root of their argument so long as it wasn't about his son. Yu Ziyuan can blame her all she wants for their toxic relationship; she will not object; after all, she did nothing to cause it to be this toxic. It had always been this way since Jiang Fengmian told her he was in an arranged marriage with a woman whose personality did not match his own.

The thing is, Yu Ziyuan had nothing to be jealous of. Even though they were incompatible and frequently misunderstood each other, Jiang Fengmian stayed despite the fact that he could have left her at any time. He gradually developed feelings for her but struggled to express them, and Yu Ziyuan was completely in love with him but was blinded by her insecurities and jealousy.

Jiang Fengmian had always been faithful to her.

Cangse Sanren groaned internally, “Changze, I need a break.”

Wei Changze, sensing his wife's distress, embraced her, “I know.”

The two continued debating the issue outside. On the way, Yu Ziyuan’s angered voice was louder and louder. Jiang Fengmian argued as well, suppressing his rage. Jiang Wanyin stood blankly where he was. After a while, he looked at Wei Wuxian and abruptly turned to leave as well.

The cultivators felt sorry for the brothers. Both did not deserve to be in the middle of that argument.

Jiang Fengmian closed his eyes. Seeing his son's expression broke his heart; he felt he had made a huge mistake. When he turned to look at his real son, he saw the same expression on his face. His hand reached out slowly to pat his shoulder, but it just hovered over his shoulders. It didn't feel right for him to console his son after what happened.

He felt like he did not have the right to apologize to his son.

He felt like he was not a pillar his son could lean on anymore.

“A-Cheng,” Jiang Yanli said softly, taking her younger brother's hand in hers. “I am here.”

Of course she is; she has always supported him. Every time their mother criticizes him, she comforts him.

“Jie.”

Jin Ling’s heart broke for his uncle as well. He may not be the best at taking care of him, but his uncle looks out for him (it gets annoying too, but it’s not like he dislikes it). And even if his uncle was harsh with him, he knew deep down that he loved him. No matter what, he’s objectively the best uncle he’s ever had. He will do his best to express himself and his love for his uncle, even if it is difficult, just to alleviate his insecurities and for him to know how much he’s loved.

Wei Wuxian frowned, “Jiang Cheng!”

Jiang Wanyin did not respond and just continued walking toward the door.

“No!” The disciples chorused.

“Don’t leave!” Zizhen exclaimed hastily. “You have to talk!”

Sizhui nodded, “You have to fix this!”

Wei Wuxian forced himself out of bed and chased after him, dragging his stiff, sore body with him, “Jiang Cheng! Jiang Cheng!”

Just like in the Xuanwu cave, Wei Wuxian was again prioritizing Jiang Wanyin over himself, and Yu Ziyuan couldn't even utter a word. Her mind and her heart were in internal conflict with each other. Every time Wei Wuxian did something like this, it reminded her that he had nothing to lose. He would willingly throw himself into the fire just to save her son because he had nothing—no parents, no real home, no one to turn to—but Jiang Cheng—he had a lot to lose, and Yu Ziyuan knew Wei Wuxian knew that.

And because he prioritized others first, her prediction came true. It wreaked havoc on the Clan.

'To attempt the impossible, huh,' she told herself.

Jiang Wanyin walked forward without a care for anything else. Wei Wuxian was so mad that he shouted, "Answer me if you heard me! Are you looking for a fight?!"

Jiang Wanyin spat, "Lie down properly!"

"I can't do that," Wei Wuxian responded. "We need to get things straight!"

"Yes!"

"Communicate properly!"

The cultivators exclaimed simultaneously.

"You really mustn't listen to those messed-up nonsense!" he shouted.

"What messed-up nonsense?" Jiang Wanyin asked coldly, feigning ignorance.

"Those things dirty your mouth even if you just say them. Both of my parents are real people in this world. I don't want other assigning me to other households!"

Most cultivators, including Wei Wuxian's parents, froze in shock when they heard this.

Now that he had his brother's attention, Wei Wuxian did not let go of his sleeve, "Let's be honest, don't hide things so sulkily in your heart. You're Uncle Jiang's own son, the future leader of the Jiang Sect. Of course Uncle Jiang would be stricter towards you."

Some of them were relieved that Wei Wuxian was not as stupid as they thought. Some of them even suspected Jiang Wanyin knew, but because of his mother's words, he is unsure who or what to believe.

Jiang Cheng cast a sidelong glance at him.

Wei Wuxian then continued, "But I'm different. I'm the son of someone else. Both of my parents are good friends of Uncle Jiang. Of course he'd cut me more slack. Such a reason you do understand, don't you?"

Jiang Wanyin snorted, "He's not strict towards me. He just doesn't like me."

"No!" Jiang Fengmian exclaimed because he had to correct his son's assumption. There had been hints that his son felt this way before, but this was undeniable proof that he felt unloved.

The Jiangs, including Yu Ziyuan, were all taken aback by the sudden shouting. They all noticed how his complexion was getting paler every second.

"A-Die," Jiang Wanyin said as he approached his father with concern. He's embarrassed that he just revealed one of his insecurities, but he couldn't care less seeing his father so shocked.

"How can there be anyone who doesn't like his own son? Stop thinking of such nonsense! Of course he likes you!" Wei Wuxian insisted.

"There is!" Jiang Wanyin shouted back. "He doesn't like my mom, and so he doesn't like me either!"

“No, that’s not true!” Jiang Fengmian insisted and turned to his son. “It’s not true, A-Cheng.”

Jiang Cheng couldn’t say anything back.

***‘Hard to argue with that,’* Wei Wuxian thought.**

Their opposing personalities; gentle and harsh were known to the entire cultivation world. As stated in the earlier memory, the Meishan Yu sect had pressured the Jiang Fengmian into the alliance despite his repeated refusals. A short time later, Cangse Sanren got married to Wei Changze, and Jiang Fengmian finally gave up.

As everyone knows, Jiang Cheng inherited both his mother's appearance and personality. He'd never been Jiang Fengmian's favorite. He had taught him Jiang Sect values since birth, but he still couldn't change.

***‘Which was why Jiang Fengmian had always seemed like he doesn’t favor his own son,’* Wei Wuxian thought.**

‘Seemed like he doesn’t?!’ Yu Ziyuan scowled. *‘With your existence, excellence, and connection to Cangse Sanren, Jiang Fengmian would continue to favor you over A-Cheng!’*

The silence became deafening, and the tension between the two brothers grew intense.

Jiang Wanyin pulled Wei Wuxian's hand away and stood up, letting out his anger, "I know! I know that I don't have the personality he likes, that I'm not the heir he wants. He thinks that I don't deserve to be Sect Leader, that I don't understand the motto of the Jiang Sect, and that I don't have the air of the Jiang Sect in me at all! Those are all true!"

Jiang Fengmian wanted to cry. Those words were far from the truth! Had he known this was how he felt all these years, he would've tried to become a better father but he didn't, and that's what makes it worse.

Lan Qiren, on the side, shakes his head. Jiang Wanyin was most likely one of the more obedient students in their generation. He understood the boy's frustration and his feelings. He is by far one of the students he genuinely likes (as opposed to Wei Wuxian). If he had been a more expressive man, he would have told the boy that he was never all of those things and that he worked hard to be the person his parents would be proud of.

Jiang Wanyin, raising his voice, still did not stop, "You killed the Xuanwu of Slaughter together with Lan Wangji, bathing in blood! How great is that?! But what about me?!" He punched his fist into a wall, clenching his teeth, "… I have also been running around for days, completely exhausted, with not one second of rest!"

This was more difficult to witness. Brothers who have been there for each other despite the harshness of their mother and the father's favoritism are gradually drifting apart.

"Please," Jiang Yanli whispered, her heart breaking for the two. She wasn't present when this happened and wishes she had been. She would have tried to console her brother and just be there for them both.

Seeing no point in continuing the conversation, Jiang Wanyin began to walk away, attempting and failing to control his emotions.

Then, a loud thump crashed down.

"Wei Wuxian!"

"Wei Ying!"

Jiang Wanyin turned around to see Wei Wuxian struggling to get his exhausted body off the ground.

“What are you doing?!” Wen Qing hissed. “Return to your bed!”

“Who said you weren't worthy to be the Clan leader?” Wei Wuxian asked, pushing himself up. “Who said that being the Clan Leader means that you have to follow the clan motto and rules? There have been generations of Jiang Clan Leaders. I don’t believe every one of them was the same.”

The Jiang Clan and some of the cultivators did a double-take.

Wei Wuxian continued, “Even the Gusulan Sect had an outlier like Lan Yi, but who would deny her position and her abilities? When talking about the famous cultivators of the Lan Sect, who could skip over her? Who could skip over her Chord Assassination technique?”

Jiang Wanyin was silent, as though he had finally become calmer. Wei Wuxian put his hand on his shoulder again and declared, "In the future, you'll be the sect leader, and I'll be your subordinate, like your father and my father.”

The cultivators sighed in disappointment, knowing it would never happen.

Wen Ning looked down. His master couldn't even keep his promise. Maybe it was because of them, or maybe it was because the world has come to regard Wei Wuxian as a demon incarnate, a person who cannot be purified. No matter what, he felt guilty. Wei Wuxian saved him and his family, but all he did in return was kill Jin Zixuan. He hurt Wei Wuxian and the Jiang siblings.

“Uncle Ning?” Sizhui asked, noticing the change in his expression. Wen Ning, who snapped into his reverie, simply patted his cousin’s head.

“So what if the Gusulan Sect has its Two Jades? The Yunmeng Jiang Sect will have its Two Prides! So, shut up,” Wei Wuxian smirked. “Who said that you don't deserve to be the sect leader? Nobody can say this; even you can't either. If you do, you're looking for a beating.”

Sometimes, Jin Zixuan forgets that Wei Wuxian is not always a mischievous or obnoxious person. This time, he was acting like his real brother, his real elder brother. In some way, he admired Wei Wuxian. Despite being in a state of recovery, he is trying his hardest to fix the situation, and he is envious of their relationship. He had wished for a brother as well. His father had a lot of *'bastards,'* as they call them, and the moment they were introduced to him he threw them aside, like trash.

“They’re good brothers,” he said, and Jiang Yanli nodded, a bright smile on her face that quickly faded.

“But not for long,” she lamented.

After Wei Wuxian’s declaration, he immediately winced when he moved too quickly. Meanwhile, Jiang Wanyin's glistening eyes couldn't take their gaze away from his brother. Then, he laughed, “You see how you are right now? Who can you beat up?”

Such a beautiful relationship. How and why did the cultivation sever such a bond? Even Jin Ling and the disciples couldn't figure out why. Wei Wuxian may have been a demonic cultivator, but he was still Wei Wuxian. The cultivation world ruined him. They took advantage of him, framed him, attempted to murder him, and distorted his story. Despite this, all Wei Wuxian did was save those who deserved to be saved. He stood tall and true to his beliefs.

Jiang Wanyin tried to protect him, but even as a sect leader surrounded by sect leaders harsher than himself, he couldn't save him at all.

“What an impressive speech, Wei Wuxian,” Madam Jin said, eliciting a shy chuckle from the man in question.

“It just needs to be said,” he said, looking over at his brother. “It was important for Jiang Cheng to hear it.”

He needed to hear that indeed, but what was the point of saying it now? Wei Wuxian broke his promise, and he was the reason why.

Meanwhile, Lan Wangji had come to understand Jiang Wanyin through his words and actions. It was inevitable that he would pick up on the personalities of those who had been in his life. What was wrong here was that, even though he understands him a little better now, he still doesn't understand why he didn't stand by Wei Ying's side and try his hardest to protect him. He didn't even address the rumors that he killed his own brother with his sword.

Still, Lan Wangji refuses to forgive him.

By the windowsill, a pair of leaves floated. Then, in the Lotus Pier corridors, Wei Wuxian was playing with Jiang Wanyin. Despite his efforts, it was clear that Wei Wuxian was moving much more slowly than usual. His severe injuries are still obvious.

Jiang Wanyin slapped Wei Wuxian across the chest. Despite the fact that medicine and bandages had already been applied to the branded wound, being slapped out of nowhere caused excruciating pain, which he disguised with a laugh, "Jiang Cheng! Come to your death!!!"

Lan Wangji promptly glared at Jiang Wanyin.

“He’s still slow,” Lan Xichen observed.

“Of course he is,” Wen Qing responded, glaring at Wei Wuxian and Jiang Wanyin. “He just recovered, but why am I surprised? He's an idiot who can't stay still, and then there's also this person who just hit him.”

Wei Wuxian and Jiang Wanyin both lowered their heads like a puppy who had been kicked.

Jiang Wanyin ducked from his strike and shouted, “You're hurting so much now, but why did you play the hero back then? Serves you right! Teaches you your lesson!”

Humming once at his brother’s words, Wei Wuxian inquired, "Was I playing the hero? I had no other choice either; I was moving faster than I could think! Stop running; I'll let you off this once. I need to ask you something! I had a perfume sachet somewhere around my waist. It was empty. Did you see it?”

At the mention of her name and the perfume sachet, Mianmian perked up.

Meanwhile, Lan Wangji, who had her perfume sachet, began to sweat. Wei Wuxian noticed and secretly laughed.

“The one that Mianmian gave you?” Jiang Wanyin asked. “I didn't.”

Wei Wuxian exclaimed his regret, “I'll find her for another one later.”

Jiang Wanyin frowned, "You're at it again. You don't really like her, do you? The girl does look fine, but it's obvious that she doesn't have much background. Maybe she isn't even a disciple. She seems like the daughter of a servant.”

Jin Zixuan and Madam Jin both glared at Jiang Wanyin for saying such a thing.

Jiang Wanyin did not waste any time and apologized, and Mianmian quickly forgave him.

“Perhaps, but what's wrong with servants?” Wei Wuxian asked. “I'm also the son of a servant, aren't I?”

Some people would have been embarrassed to be labeled as a servant's child, but Wei Wuxian was one of those people who didn't mind. But even if he’s the son of a servant, he’s also the son of the immortal Baoshan Sanren’s disciple. That makes the immortal his grandmaster in some ways.

Unsurprisingly, both of them are grandmasters.

“Such a humble person,” a female cultivator sighed. “Does the story about him being arrogant hold any water?”

“I don’t think so,” her friend chimed in. “But then again, we don't have knowledge about the past.”

Jiang Wanyin then responded, “How can you compare to her? Whose servant is like you, having your master peel lotus seeds for you and boil you soup. I didn't even get to have some!”

Wei Wuxian grinned, “If you want some just ask Shijie to cook you more.”

The two brothers then continued their conversation. Wei Wuxian and Jiang Wanyin are discussing the situation at the Lan Sect. Jiang Wanyin explains that Lan Wangji did not leave a message for Wei Wuxian, that Lan Xichen has not been found, and that Lan Qiren is exhausted from working. He also informed him that the Lan Sect's leader had died.

Being reminded of the situation on Cloud Recesses and Qingheng-jun’s death made them flinch. It was as if the truth had slapped them across the face far too hard.

Jiang Wanyin also reveals that the Wen Sect planned to burn down their library pavilion, but the Lan Sect's people saved some of the ancient books and music scores and gave them to Lan Xichen, telling him to run away with them.

Looking at the sky, Wei Wuxian cursed, “How disgusting.”

“Yeah. The Wen Sect is too disgusting.”

Wen Ning, Wen Qing, and Sizhui were all startled. They knew those words were not directed at them, but the fact that they shared the same surname as those other Wens was truly, utterly disgusting. They will never allow themselves to be identified as one of them.

Wei Wuxian then added, “For how long are they going to jump around like this? We've got so many sects. Can't we join together and...”

Suddenly, a series of footsteps came. A group of boys wearing training clothes leaped across the hallway like monkeys, shouting, “Shixiong!!!”

Jiang Yanli, Jiang Wanyin, Jiang Fengmian, and Wei Wuxian all smiled when they saw their former disciples being so enthusiastic.

However, the realization that these children had died a long time ago caused their smiles to fade and was replaced by sorrowful and regretful expressions.

The youngest shidi beamed, “Shixiong!!! You're alive now!!!”

Wei Wuxian laughed, “What do you mean I'm alive now? I've never died to begin with!”

“Not yet,” an unknown cultivator whispered, the corner of his lips quirking up.

“Shixiong, I heard that you killed a beast over four hundred years old?! Is it true? You killed it?!”

“Compared to this, what I really want to know is, Shixiong, did you really go without food for seven days?!”

“You really haven't secretly practiced inedia behind our backs?!”

“Woah,” Xiao Xingchen chuckled. “These kids are quite excited.”

Nie Huaisang squealed, “They’re so cute!”

‘I guess we’re not that cute,’ the disciples thought simultaneously. *‘You nearly led us to our deaths at Yi City.’*

“Just how big really was the Xuanwu of Slaughter? Would it fit inside Lotus Lake?!”

“The Xuanwu of Slaughter was just a tortoise right?!”

“Shixiong, you spent the entire seven days with Lan WangJi from Gusu? And he didn't beat you to death?!”

The disciples' never-ending barrage of questions made them laugh.

“They sure love you!” Mianmian exclaimed as she turned to face Wei Wuxian. Looking at these adorable disciples reminded her of her own adorable daughter as well.

Agreeing, Wei Wuxian exclaimed, “Of course!”

“Do they always do this?” Lan Xichen wondered, and Wei Wuxian nodded enthusiastically.

“The kids adore him, or more like they worship him,” Jiang Yanli interjected, delightedly chuckling. “They follow him around like little ducklings.”

Some of them can't stop picturing Wei Wuxian as a mother hen leading her chicks (the disciples) around Lotus Pier.

Cangse Sanren and Wei Changze were just overjoyed that these young children admired their son.

Proving her point, Nie Huiasang nodded because he felt like he was also one of Wei Wuxian’s little ducklings before. He'd follow him around and do fun things with him just because he felt at ease with him and thought he was interesting. He can imagine that the current disciples are feeling similarly.

“It's no surprise that the kids adore you, Wei-xiong,”

The scene then faded away, and the Nightless City came into view.

Wen Chao was on his knees, bowing as low as he can.

As a result of the sudden change in memory, everyone immediately quieted down as tension slowly built up

“Chao-er, do you know which taboo you broke in the incident at Mt. Muxi?” Wen Ruohan inquired.

“I am…witless,” Wen Chao responded, sweat streaming down his cheeks. “Please enlighten me, Father.”

“You should’ve killed them all.”

Simultaneous growls escaped from multiple cultivators.

“Wen Ruohan,” Nie Mingjue hissed. “How fucking dare you!”

“The audacity to start a war between clans,” Song Lan muttered.

“They already started before we already knew it,” Lan Qiren said, glaring at the man on the screen. “They would’ve started without us provoking them anyway.”

That was true…

“If it weren’t for Wei Wuxian pushing your son aside after he woke that monster up, he would’ve died,” a young cultivator spat. “But then again, you don’t care about him.”

An unknown cultivator sneered, “What benefit does he gain from taking down sects?”

“Power and glory,” his friend responded, stating the obvious. “They'll thrive and demolish more sects.”

“The only thing that kept Wen Clan high up the hierarchy is because of Wen Ruohan and Wen Zhuliu,” another cultivator interjected. “Honestly, if Wen Zhuliu's power wasn't that terrifying, we'd only be worried about him.”

“He was closer to achieving immortality too.”

“Thank God he died before becoming an immortal; imagine having two immortals in this generation; damn terrifying!”

“See how compliant the cultivation clans have become,” Wen Ruohan continued. “It's only because of our Qishan Wen Clan's Iron Fist; once we let go, those restless scoundrels will surely turn around and bite us.”

“F-Father,” Wen Chao stammered, “what should I do now?”

“Anyone who wishes to hold a perpetual hegemony must establish absolute authority, cloud the minds, restrain the limbs, and block the eyes and ears,” Wen Ruohan explained as he turned his back on his son. “Although the former two would take a long time to accomplish and are precautionary measures, the latter two could take effect immediately.”

“You mean… setting up Supervisory Offices?”

“What?!” The disciples exclaimed in disbelief.

“"You're all so full of yourself! If you're not taking down sects, you're going to spy on them now?!” Jingyi shouted because this was not fair! They’re too much!

“Exactly,” Wen Ruohan responded. “If they comply, then take them under our command and have them work for us.”

“No way!”

“I’ll kill myself before I become someone else’s dog!”

Madam Jin was seething in her seat. The Lanling Jin Clan was the only clan that hesitated to join the other clans in overthrowing the Wen Clan. It wasn’t the clan itself that hesitated, but her husband himself. He didn't want to be one of Wen Ruohan's adversaries. He was a coward, and instead of fighting, she speculated that he wanted to be an ally to Wen Ruohan in order to save himself.

She won't be surprised if her husband agreed to build these offices solely to comply with Wen Ruohan's orders.

Hell, she should've been the one ruling the clan instead.

"And… if they resist?" Wen Chao asked.

"Kill one to deter the others."

And this is where it all began.

Wei Wuxian let out a long sigh. He isn't ready yet. He isn't prepared to witness any more death and bloodshed. He is not prepared to watch himself suffer.

He isn't prepared for everything, but he had to prepare for the worst.

After medicine was applied to the brand mark on his chest, Wei Wuxian'a fever quickly subsided. Thanks to his powerful golden core, he was energized again after only a few days of rest. As a result of the chaos caused by the Xuanwu of Slaughter, all of the disciples, including Nie Huaisang, returned to their sects safely.

The cultivators exhaled a sigh of relief.

After what happened, Wen Chao didn't follow up either. Taking advantage of the situation, Madam Yu gave Wei WuXian a stern lecture and ordered him not to leave Lotus Pier, not even to play in the lake.

"Are you serious?" Cangse Sanren scowled as she glared at Yu Ziyuan.

Yu Ziyuan did not speak and only glared back, refusing to let her guilt overcome her.

No matter how entertaining a game was, playing it every day would eventually become tedious. And so, the boys' interest waned about a month later. Wei Wuxian hadn't been in the mood, either. He shot carelessly and even let Jiang Wanyin take first place a couple of times.

His brother letting him win a couple of times brought sting to Jiang Wanyin's heart, but they were far less potent than he had expected. As expected, he was not his brother's equal for him to exert more effort, even when shooting kites. Wei Wuxian was doing that to make him feel better about himself.

Jiang Wanyin glanced at his father and mother. He saw his father looking back at him with no judgement in his eyes. Instead, there was only concern. Somehow, the concern left a warm feeling in his chest. His mother, on the other hand, appeared even more irritated than before. She must’ve been thinking that Wei Wuxian was going easy on him, but that was not the case.

“Jiang Cheng—”

“Don’t speak, Wei Wuxian,” he said and turned to his brother. “I know.”

One day after the last round had been shot down, Wei Wuxian used his right hand to form shade between his brows and looked into the sunset, saying, “Let's wrap things up and stop playing. Food's waiting at home.”

“A-Niang,” Jin Ling said, turning to face his mother, his eyes twinkling with excitement. “Can I try your Lotus pork rib soup?”

Jiang Yanli, endeared by her son’s reaction, smiled and leaned down to boop his nose, “Of course, A-Ling. I can cook right away when we get back.”

“Yes!”

“Hey!” Jiang Wanyin piped in, his brows furrowing. “I want one as well!”

“Of course!”

Wei Wuxian stared at his siblings and A-Ling with a melancholic smile. He also wanted to join. He missed his shijie’s soup, but he’s ashamed. He already caused a lot of trouble for her in the past, and he was responsible for her…. In any case, he did not have the right to—

“A-Xian, would you like to join us?” Jiang Yanli inquired and Wei Wuxian wants to cry. Even now, his sister still looks at him with such kindness that it hurts. He felt even more guilty for causing her—

“A-Li!” Yu Ziyuan shouted. “What's the point of inviting him when—“

“A-Niang,” Jiang Yanli interrupts. “With all due respect, I did not ask you, I asked *my* brother.”

Yu Ziyuan was stunned and enraged, but Jiang Yanli didn't care about her feelings right now. She, too, missed her brother and would do anything to spend some time with him.

“Shijie,” Wei Wuxian began with a low voice. “As much as I wanted to, I—”

“You will join or I will break your legs?!” Jin Ling and Jiang Wanyin yelled simultaneously, causing Wei Wuxian to freeze. However, he quickly recovered and let out a light chuckle.

“Okay.”

Jiang Cheng wondered, “This early?”

Wei Wuxian tossed the bow to the side and sat on the ground, disappointed, “It's boring. Let's stop. Which ones were last in the round we just did? Go get them with our sixth shidi.”

One boy said, “Shixiong, you're so tricky. You make others get them every time. That's shameless.”

Wei Wuxian waved his hands and said, “I have no other choice either. Madame Yu doesn't let me go outside. She's at home right now. Maybe Jinzhu and Yinzhu are watching from some corner, ready to turn me whenever possible. If I went out, Madam Yu's going to whip a whole layer of skin off me again.”

Cangse Sanren laughed a little bit manically. The cultivators shivered in their seats. It was understandable for a parent to be outraged if their child was being whipped, but this was different; this was Cangse Sanren, the immortal Baoshan Sanren's disciple. Her outstanding cultivation was well-known among the immortal’s disciples even after she departed.

She’s powerful…

“Again? A-Ying did say he was abused,” Cangse Sanren stated before she hissed. “Yu Ziyuan, I will fucking kill you.”

“A-Niang!”

“Cangse Sanren!” Lan Qiren shouted.

“Lan Qiren!” Cangse Sanren shouted back. “Since when have you been concerned with other people's affairs, huh? I will have you know that intervention is prohibited, so stay out of

this!”

“He was abused?” Yu Ziyuan repeated, furious at the accusation. “Whipping him is my method of disciplining him!”

Cangse Sanren sneered, “Sure, anyone can whip a disciple when they made an error, but knowing you, you’d even whip a rock for its existence.”

“How dare—”

“Enough!” causing the entire temple to tremble slightly. “Do I need to ask the Lans to silence both of you?!”

Both ladies avoided eye contact and shut their mouths. For a second, they thought that the two would eventually clash, but the immortal stepped in.

What would have happened if it had occurred?

Well, it will eventually happen soon. With all the bloodshed, pain, and suffering in the future, Cangse Sanren and Wei Changze would undoubtedly lose their minds.

The shidi, who performed the worst banter, laughed as they set off to get the kites. Jiang Cheng was standing, while Wei Wuxian sat on the ground.

“Uncle Jiang left so early in the morning—why hasn't he returned yet?” Wei Wuxian inquired. “Will he arrive in time for dinner?”

Jiang Fengmian and Yu Ziyuan argued again in the morning.

The cultivators couldn’t resist groaning in annoyance.

It didn't seem quite right to call it an argument. Yu Ziyuan was the only one who lost her cool, while Jiang Fengmian's bearing remained throughout the exchange.

The memory was then shifted back until they could see Wei Wuxian, Jiang Wanyin, and a few other disciples hiding behind a large pillar, watching the argument.

“Why are they quarreling again?” Wei Wuxian wondered, sighing slightly.

“I don’t know, either,” the disciple answered. “Maybe because one of Madame Yu’s hairpins was broken.” Then, the disciple turned around and sighed, “Since Madame Yu is furious now, our training will be hell.”

“Be quiet!” Another disciple reprimanded. “We’ll be punished if Madame Yu hears us.”

They did witness the hellish training that these disciples had gone through in the earlier scenes. They couldn't help but feel sorry for them. Although the torturous training would be beneficial to these kids, it would result in fatigue and multiple injuries. However, Yu Ziyuan will definitely not care about that at the moment.

The judgmental stares directed at Yu Ziyuan made her uncomfortable and angry but resolutely ignored them.

The sky darkened, and the memory was moved several hours later.

Jiang Fengmian was on a boat with many of his older disciples when he looked down at the hairpin in his hand. It was the broken one mentioned earlier, which he had given to Yu ZIyuan shortly after breaking off Jiang Yanli's engagement.

Yu Ziyuan’s hand moved unconsciously to touch the jade hairpin in her robes. She had not worn it until now and possibly not sooner. However, couldn't help but notice her husband's expression as he examined the broken jade. She knew her eyes weren't playing tricks on her but Jiang Fengmian looked sad and conflicted.

‘Was he affected by the fight earlier?’ Yu Ziyuan pondered.

After several long seconds of staring at the hairpin, Jiang Fengmian hid it away and ordered, “Let’s sail.”

“Yes, Sect Leader,” the disciple behind him agreed with a low bow.

The boat began to move.

Back on the hill, Jiang Wanyin explained, “He's at the Wen Sect for our swords again, isn't he?” His expression then turned into disgust. “Whenever I think that my Sandu might be in the hands of a Wen-dog right now, I...”

“I, too, would be disgusted if my sword fell into the hands of an enemy,” Zizhen muttered, scrunching up his nose.

“Ugh, it pisses me off too,” Jingyi grumbled. “If their swords weren’t taken away, Hanguang-jun and Senior wouldn’t be trapped in that cave.”

Wei Wuxian added, "What a shame that our swords don't have that much spiritual energy yet. If they could sheath themselves, then nobody would be able to use them.”

Around them, the sky turned a bloody red, lit on fire by the setting sun.

“So pretty,” Nie Huaisang whispered.

Jiang Wanyin teased, “If you cultivate for another eighty years, then maybe it'd be possible.”

Suddenly, a few boys rushed into the training fields of Lotus Pier, shouting with urgency, “Shixiong, Shixiong, something's happened!!!”

Wei Wuxian frowned and jumped up, asking, “What's wrong?” and rushing over to them. These were the shidis who went to retrieve the kites.

“Where's the youngest one?” Jiang Wanyin asked. “Why is there one missing?"

“No,” Jiang Yanli whispered, her expression terrified.

Lan Xichen clenched his fists, “It has begun.”

Terrified, the disciples couldn’t help but utter, “What?”

One of the boys panted, “Our shidi was taken away!”

“Taken away?!”

Nie Mingjue growled while Qingheng-jun frowned, protective instincts rising.

“Now they’ve done it,” Wen Qing sighed.

“Did you know that this was going to happen?” Nie Mingjue demanded furiously.

“"I was aware they were planning to attack a sect,” Wen Qing answered calmly. “However, I had no idea which sect it was.”

Wei Wuxian picked up his bow as well. Weapon in hand, he demanded, "Who took him? Why was he taken away?!"

“We don't know! We don't know why they took him!”

“Wang Lingjiao, you bitch, how dare you!” Yu Ziyuan exclaimed, staring at her disciple's terrified expression. She may be cruel in their training, but she is still protective of her disciples.

Jiang Wanyin jumped to his feet and frantically demanded, “What do you mean you don’t know?!”

“Calm down,” Wei Wuxian instructed. “Tell us clearly.”

Observing Wei Wuxian and Jiang Wanyin's reactions to this dire situation, Xiao Xingchen immediately noticed two distinct things. Wei Wuxian possessed Jiang Fengmian's calm demeanor, whereas Jiang Wanyin possessed his mother's.

‘Now I understand why he's said to be Jiang Fengmian's son,’ he thought.

When the boy finally calmed down, he explained, “When, when we were getting the kites, the kites went over there, really far away. When we went over, we saw a dozen of people, all from the Wen Sect, wearing their uniform.”

Jiang Fengmian couldn't stop himself from closing his eyes. Why did the Wens attack his home right after he left? Why wasn’t he fast enough to save his people? His wife? His children?

The disciple wiped away his tears and continued, “The one leading them was a young woman. She’s holding a kite in her hand and there was an arrow through it. She asked us whose kite it was when she saw us.”

Another disciple added, “The kite was our youngest shidi’s, so he said that it was his. Then the woman got angry and shouted *‘how dare you’*, and then she told her people to take him away!”

“Just like that?”

“Who does that woman think she is?!” Madam Jin exclaimed, disgusted and enraged at the woman's audacity. She is not even an heir, but rather Wen Chao's concubine. Who does she believe she is commanding among Wen Chao's people as if she were royalty?

This really pisses her off. It makes her think of her husband's concubines.

“That woman really needs to go,” a female cultivator spat. “I really, really hate her.”

The disciples nodded, “We asked her why they were taking him away, and the woman kept on saying that he committed treason and had hidden motives, and she ordered her people to detain him. We couldn’t do anything about it so we ran back.”

“Committed treason?” Lan Xichen repeated, his frown growing deeper. “That boy was only playing.”

“If the boy had hidden motives, maybe that says something about you instead,” Jin Zixuan retorted.

“Such nonsense excuse,” Nie Mingjue hissed. “Karma is coming to get you, assholes.”

Jiang Wanyin cursed, “They don’t even have a reason for taking him away!”

That’s right, they don't; they're just using it to provoke the Jiang Clan.

“Just what does the Wen Sect intend to do?!”

“Nobody talk,” Wei Wuxian ordered. “The Wen Sect’s people could be knocking at our doors every second now. Don’t let them hear anything we say that could be used to hold against us.”

Lan Qiren already knows that Wei Wuxian knows how to keep his mouth shut when the situation is serious, but in some way, it amazes him how quickly he can switch from teasing to solemn. He couldn't help but recall Cangse Sanren being the same way.

After a brief pause, Wei Wuxian demanded, “The woman, was she not wearing a sword? Does she look kind of pretty, with a mole above her lips?”

The shidi nodded furiously, “Yes! That’s her!”

Mianmian used to tremble when she heard her name, knowing she was almost branded with Wen Sect iron. But now, she’s filled with utter disgust and the desire to slap her across the face for her audacity.

She hopes Yu Ziyuan can smack some sense into her.

“Wang Lingjiao!” Jiang Wanyin spoke with hatred. “That—”

With her flowing violet robes, Yu Ziyuan strode over with Jinzhu and Yinzhu, still armored, following behind her, “Why the noise? Can’t I have just one day of peace and quiet?!”

Seeing her approach, Jiang Wanyin explained, "A-Niang, the Wen Sect's people are here. Our youngest shidi was taken by them!"

"You all were shouting so loudly that I heard everything from inside," Yu Ziyuan responded. "So what? He was taken away, not killed, and you're already so worked up. Are you still what a Sect Leader should be? Calm down!"

'Huh, maybe I was wrong,' Xiao Xingchen observed. *'Perhaps she possesses assertiveness as well?'*

On the side, the real Jiang Wanyin blushed slightly as he acknowledged his mother's point. He should've kept his cool, regardless of Wen Ruohan's order.

As Yu Ziyuan finished, she turned to face the gates before the training fields. About a dozen of the Wen Sect's cultivators, dressed in the sun-patterned robes, entered one after another. Behind these cultivators, a woman in vibrant clothes walked inside with deliberate steps.

The scene was sped up, and the first thing they heard was rhythmic, impatient taps on a table. Its source became clear; Wang Lingjiao is in the main hall.

Multiple women glared at her. Not only did she invite herself inside, but she also had the audacity to sit there impatiently as if she were the lady of the house?

"How shameless," Madam Lan spoke.

Cangse Sanren nodded, "Indeed."

"She's not even that pretty," remarked a female cultivator.

Wang Lingjiao was irritated as she looked left and right, expectantly. Unable to take it any longer, she slapped her hand against the table.

“My tea?” she demanded.

“Oh, you're asking for tea now?” Madam Jin smirked, her eyes twitching in irritation. “Why don’t you make it yourself?”

“There’s no tea,” Yinzhu answered. “Pour some yourself.”

Wang Lingjiao, displeased, asked, “Don’t the Jiang Sect’s servants ever do anything?”

“The Jiang Sect’s servants have more important things to do,” Jinzhu responded, unimpressed. “Nobody ever needs others to do things like pouring tea. They’re not crippled.”

Nie Huaisang and Jin Zixuan did not snort. Not at all.

“I like them,” Nie Mingjue smirked in approval, while Jiang Yanli looked anxiously at her mother and her servants on the screen.

The tension in the room in that scene was really building up and they felt like they were feeling it as well.

Wang Lingjiao scoffed, “Your clan is too audacious! I came here under Wen-er-gongzi’s order. The hierarchy of cultivation clans needs to be clear.”

As Wang Lingjiao went on with her threats, the maids did not pay her any attention. Instead, maids turned toward the door and bowed as Yu Ziyuan entered.

Madam Lan and Madam Jin clenched their fists. They come to dislike Yu Ziyuan, but she was still the lady of the house. When the lady of the house enters the room, the visitors are expected to show some respect, but woman definitely was not it. She did not even offer the slightest bit of acknowledgment.

Madam Jin couldn't help but remark, “That woman needs to learn some manners,”

Cangse Sanren huffed, “I’m not even going to be surprised if she’s uneducated.”

Seeing that her disrespectful greeting had been ignored, Wang Lingjiao spoke with disdain, “Madam Yu, your Jiang Sect is really outrageous. This can’t be the case. Even maids dare interrupt a conversation in the main hall. Servants like this have their faces slapped in the Wen Sect.”

Hearing that, Wei Wuxian couldn’t help but comment, *‘You say that, but you’re a servant as well, aren’t you?’*

The majority of the disciples and adults snorted. Even Lan Wangji couldn’t resist laughing a bit.

“Oh, I would’ve loved to hear Senior Wei say that again,” Jingyi laughed.

“Jinzhu and Yinzhu aren’t the usual servants,” Yu Ziyuan spoke without hesitation. “"They've been with me since I was a child; they've never served anyone other than me, and there hasn't been anyone who can slap them; they can't, and they don't dare to.”

‘But you’d constantly whip a ‘son of a servant’ without hesitation?’ Nie Huaisang pondered as he looked at Yu Ziyuan. *‘I fail to understand your mindset at all, Madam Yu.’*

“What are you talking about, Madam Yu?” Wang Lingjiao asked. “For a prominent sect not to be in chaos, there must be a clear distinction between the superior and the inferior; servants should be what servants ought to be.”

“Then what the hell are you doing right now?” Song Lan inquired. “Waltzing in uninvited and acting like a superior does not appear to be what servants are supposed to do.”

“She’s just shameless,” A-Qing said, contorting her face in disgust.

Glaring down at the woman, Yu Ziyuan asked, “Why did you take my clan’s disciple away?”

Wang Lingjiao stood up and responded, “Madam Yu, it’s best if you draw a clear line between yourself and that brat. He had hidden intentions, but he’s already been caught red-handed by me and transferred to wherever he’ll be taken care of.”

Wei Wuxian and Jiang Wanyin glared at her.

Yu Ziyuan clenched her fists, “You have no right to tell me who I should draw a clear line with.”

“What hidden intentions could our youngest shidi have?” a voice asked.

Jiang Wanyin and Wei Wuxian entered the room.

Wang Lingjiao set down a kite on the table, “The evidence is conclusive, and you're trying to deny it?”

Nie Huaisang raised a brow, “What’s an arrow that pierced a kite have to do with the Jiang Sect's youngest disciple's supposed hidden intentions?”

“Everyone knows those types of kites are used for shooting,” Jin Zixuan pointed out. “What’s her point here?”

“It’s just a usual Cyclops kite,” Wei Wuxian stated. “And you refer to it as evidence?”

Wang Lingjiao scoffed before approaching them, “Why must he pick this circular Cyclops among all kinds of kites? Too much of a coincidence?”

“What is she even talking about?” Wei Changze asked, confusion evident on his face.

“So?” Yu Ziyuan asked after being silent for a while.

Laughing as though she had caught them red-handed, Wang Lingjiao responded, “Madame Yu, are you feigning ignorance?” She then pointed at the kite and continued, “The drawing on the kite represents the Wen Clan's sun motif; shooting this kite is a metaphor for shooting the sun.”

“That doesn’t even look like a sun!” Jin Ling exclaimed, growing increasingly irritated with this woman.

“What an amazing conspiracy theory,” Zizhen snorted. “Did she come up with that after coming there?”

“Unbelievable,” Wen Qing says, shaking her head. “Any excuse would have been better than that.”

Scoffing at her nonsense, Wei Wuxian responded, “You can always make excuses to blame one—”

“Shut up!” Yu Ziyuan shouted before she turned her back on Wang Lingjiao and saw down to her seat. She continued calmly past the illogical argument to get to the point, “Did you come here just for this kite?”

“Of course not,” Wang Lingjiao answered. “I’m here to punish someone on behalf of Wen Clan and Wen-er-gongzi.”

Wei Wuxian's heart skipped a beat.

Shaking her head, Jiang Yanli whispered, “No, *no.*”

“She can’t be serious,” Mianmian grumbled, her eyes widening in disbelief.

With a smile, her eyes landed on Wei Wuxian.

“You fucking bitch!” Cangse Sanren cursed. “Just because Wen Clan and Wen Chao had your back doesn't give you the authority to do whatever you want!”

Lan Wangji, like his husband's mother, felt the same way. Maybe he should have returned to Yunmeng with him. Perhaps he should've stayed with him and protected him. But it’s too late to regret things now; he can only watch his husband get hurt by everything.

“Stay away from Senior Wei!”

“Senior Wei, get away!”

With all the disciples’ warnings, Wei Wuxian could only smile sadly. He is grateful for their forewarning. Back then, he could only accept Yu Ziyuan’s punishment, and he almost accepted the fact that he would lose his hand. At the time, all he could think about was accepting anything in exchange for sect peace. He owes Jiang Sect so much for taking him in; it seemed like the only way he could repay them.

As Wei Wuxian had thought, the next moment, Wang Lingjiao pointed at him, “On the Dusk-Creek Mountain, this brat made rude remarks when Wen-er-gongzi was fighting

with the Xuanwu of Slaughter, causing many disturbances; he made Wen-er-gongzi tired, almost losing to the beast—he even lost his sword!"

Jiang Wanyin was so enraged after hearing how she turned black into white and made up stories that he laughed.

"That was like months ago when it happened," A-Qing said with a scoff. "What made her decide to go to the Jiang Sect now?"

"Her visit wasn't just to punish someone," Wen Ning responded with a frown. "She's there for other reasons. More importantly, they're trying to provoke Jiang Sect into attacking first, followed by Jiang Clan's destruction."

"What?!"

'I see,'* Wei Wuxian thought. '*They purposely chose to come at such a time. Or, rather, they purposely led Uncle Jiang out of here!'

It's infuriating to see this happening. Jiang Fengmian can't do anything but watch his wife fight these people and protect their home. He did suspect that the Wen Sect might be up to something after contacting him to get their swords, but he dismissed it, thinking that was only his purpose in going there and that nothing will happen.

He should have relied on his instincts.

"How lucky! The Heavens blessed Wen-er-gongzi," Wang Lingjiao continued. "Even though he lost his sword, he was able to safely take down the Xuanwu of Slaughter."

"That beast was taken down by Lan Wangji and Wei Wuxian," Jin Zixuan interjected. "All he ever did was run away. Such a coward."

“But this brat, we can't stand him any longer! Madame Yu, please punish him severely and use him as an example to the rest of the Yunmeng Jiang Sect.”

Wei Changze and Cangse Sanren couldn’t believe what they were hearing. This woman is genuinely asking Yu Ziyuan to punish him, knowing full well that Yu Ziyuan will do so.

“Yu Ziyuan,” Wei Changze said, turning to face the Violet Spider, his eyes filled with worry, “You won't, right? You're not that cruel to hurt my son in that way, are you?”

“A-Die,” Wei Wuxian called out, his distress gradually washing over him.

Yu Ziyuan clenched her fists and averted her gaze, refusing to respond.

“Please answer, Yu—”

“Enough, Changze!” Cangse Sanren shouted, her face darkening. “Why bother asking if you already know the answer?”

“A-Niang—”

“Shut up!” Yu Ziyuan commanded.

Watching Yu Ziyuan’s reaction, Wang Lingjiao was quite pleased, “Wei Ying, if I recall correctly, is a servant of Yunmeng Jiang Sect, isn't he?”

“He is not!” Jiang Wanyin protested with rage in his eyes. “And he never will be!”

“Jiang Cheng..”

“Not another word, Wei Wuxian!”

“At the moment, without Sect Leader Jiang's presence, I'm sure Madam Yu knows what needs to be done; otherwise, if Yunmeng Jiang Sect insists on defending him, it'll make people wonder if certain rumors are true…”

“Why the hell are you bringing up that topic now?!” a Jin disciple exclaimed anxiously.

“Could someone please resurrect Xue Yang right now?” a female cultivator growled. “I really want him to cut her tongue!”

“What rumors?!” Jiang Wanyin demanded.

“What else? Just the former love affairs of Clan Leader Jiang.”

At the moment, Yu Ziyuan was already fiddling with Zidian as if she was considering Wang Lingjiao’s words.

“No,” Jiang Yanli pleaded as she turned to face her mother, tears welling up at the corners of her eyes. “Please don’t hurt A-Xian, A-Niang!”

Wei Wuxian turned to his sister, speaking lowly, “Jie.”

“I can’t do anything to change it, A-Li!” Yu Ziyuan shouted back.

“You—”

Just as Wei Wuxian moved to attack, pain shot through his back and his knees buckled.

He crashed to the floor.

“A-Ying!!”

“Wei Ying!!”

“Wei Wuxian!!”

Yu Ziyuan had already risen. Zidian had transformed into its whip form, sizzling between her cold jade hands.

“A… A-Niang, no!”

“Jiang Cheng, back off!” Wei Wuxian shouted.

Wei Wuxian inhaled deeply as he watched the scene, his heart heavy. The things he does for love and devotion...so priceless...such selflessness..

Lan Wangji embraced his husband tighter to resist the temptation of hurting his foster mother and to comfort him.

Ignoring her son's pleas, Yu Ziyuanu stepped in front of Wei Wuxian, gazing down with cold eyes, “I’ve said so before that you are an unruly rascal who will get our clan into some big trouble sooner or later!”

The whip cracked down, and Wei Wuxian’s blood sprayed into the air.

The cultivators let out horrified gasps. Some cultivators smirked with delight.

Cangse Sanren and Wei Changze sees red.

“No!”

“Stop this!

Before her son’s horrified eyes, Yu Ziyuan whipped Zidian against Wei Wuxian’s back over and over again.

Just as Wei Wuxian had predicted, she tore off a layer of flesh.

“Yu *Ziyuan!!!!”* Cangse Sanren shouted as she charged forward, unsheathing her sword.

Yu Ziyuan expected this to happen, so she was prepared for her attack and was about to dodge when Jiang Fengmian stood in front of her, raising both of his arms.

“Cangse Sanren, stop!”

The said woman halted, “Move out of the way, Jiang Fengmian! She hurt my son!”

“She didn’t have a choice—”

“Choice?!” Cangs Sanren snarled. “Choice does not exist in her vocabulary! With a heartbeat, she’d punish my son!”

Wronged, Yu Ziyuan snapped, “He caused so much trouble to the Jiang Sect! Disciplining him—”

“Enough with the discipline!” Cangse Sanren shouted back. “Abuse and discipline are not the same things! Don't be misled by such beliefs!”

This was getting out of hand; if they start fighting here, there will be collateral damage, and the immortal will be furious. Perhaps she'll throw them all out without even hearing the whole story.

Wei Wuxian stepped in, grabbing either side of his mother’s shoulder, “A-Niang, stop. You can’t fight here!”

Stubbornly, Cangse Sanren protested, “Who says I can’t?!”

“I am,” with the immortal’s authoritative tone, Cangse Sanren turned around to see her grandmaster's disapproving expression. “Did I teach you to fight with others without my permission?”

“But Grandmaster she—”

“I know what she did,” Baoshan Sanren interrupted. “And I understand how you feel, but I didn't give you permission to fight.”

That means she can request permission later. If she approves, she will be able to avenge her son, so she gritted her teeth and lowered her sword and head, saying, “This humble disciple wishes to apologize for acting carelessly.”

The cultivators watched as Cangse Sanren calmed down in a matter of seconds and walked back to her husband’s side, who looks more furious than ever but is also composed.

One was angry in silence, and the other one snapped and raged. They had just noticed now, that both their anger, was truly terrifying.

“A-Niang, stop it!” Jiang Wanyin shouted. “A-Niang!!!”

‘Don’t stop, Yu-furen,’ an unknown cultivator thought. *‘Punish him well!’*

‘You deserve this, Wei Wuxian,’ another cultivator thought, delighted by the scene.

In the past, all the punishments he received were two to three strikes and being grounded. Right now, Wei Wuxian is suffering and enduring dozens of heavy strikes. His back burned and his entire body was numb with pain. He couldn’t bear it, but he had to because if this won’t satisfy Wang Lingjiao, the matter at hand would never end.

“Why?!” Cangse Sanren yelled, turning to face her son, nearly in tears but holding it back. “Why prioritize others before yourself?! Why must you suffer for someone else's satisfaction? Why must you suffer for things you didn't do?!”

Wei Wuxian gave a resigned smile. He couldn't respond, and he couldn’t reveal his reasons, but he suspects his mother already knew everything but wanted to hear it from him.

When her son did not respond, Cangse Sanren embraced her son tightly.

Meanwhile, Wei Changze, who did not join in the hug, turned his eyes to Yu Ziyuan. No expression, no words—just staring.

Yu Ziyuan refuses to admit that it made her uneasy. Although she understood Wei Changze's expression before, this time, it conveyed nothing. It was like watching an active volcano—the calm before the storm.

After Jinzhu and Yinzhu successfully restrained Jiang Wanyin, Yu Ziyuan returned to whipping Wei Wuxian.

The sizzling purple light danced through the air, landing without a miss on Wei Wuxian's back, tearing his back more and more. Despite the obvious pain, he clenched his teeth and took it all in, remaining silent and motionless.

Back then, when Wei Wuxian got punished in Cloud Recesses, he wailed loudly, but now, he was enduring the pain without making a sound.

Crying without making a sound was far worse.

Lan Qiren felt guilty and looked down.

Scornful and angry gazes were directed at Yu Ziyuan, and Jiang Fengmian had to shield her from them.

Jiang Yanli and Jiang Wanyin can’t even look into their mother’s eyes at the moment.

“Stop this!”

“Don’t hurt him anymore!”

The disciples cried out, tears streaming down their cheeks.

Lan Wangji clutched his husband close while covering his ears. Although his husband stated that he can endure, he is aware that he cannot. His younger self's cries continue to haunt him, reminding him of the… Burial Mounds. He had to wake up in the middle of the night to find his husband crying after having a bad nightmare.

And this was his nightmare as well.

Wei Wuxian collapsed onto the ground, and the beatings continued. The only sounds in the room were Zidian tearing his back rhythmically and the few cries of anguish from Wei Wuxian and Jiang Wanyin's desperate pleas.

Wei Wuxian endured hit, after hit.

'It hurts, it hurts, IT HURTS!!'

"Stop!!"

"No more!!"

Hateful eyes are everywhere. Yu Ziyuan let out a sigh and massaged her temples. This was fine. After this, Wei Wuxian would be taken to the healer's room to recover. He'll get better and cause more trouble again because he was the epitome of their sect's motto.

This is what she desired to believe. She knew it would never happen because some bitch fired a Wen Signal, sparking the battle between the Wen Clan and the Jiang Sect.

For a split second, she considered, What if she didn't whip Wei Wuxian like that? What if she didn't give Wang Lingjiao everything she desired? What if she fought back from the start? What if...

"Y-You," Jin Ling spoke as his body trembled.

"Xue Yang may be a monster, but Wei Ying is worse than he is! All practitioners of demonic cultivation should be eliminated! They should all be eradicated!"

“You want the truth? Fine, I despise him! He causes too much trouble for Jiang Sect! He's the cause of Yunmeng Jiang Sect's demise!”

“Are so cruel,” Jin Ling finished, his tears streaming down his cheeks.

Yu Ziyuan widened her eyes, shocked.

In some ways, he was also like his Grandmother. He spoke ill of Wei Wuxian, despised him for what he did to his parents, and stabbed him at Carp Tower, but after learning the truth, it was extremely difficult for him, but he eventually came to accept him, forgive him, and begin to like him.

He is aware of his past mistakes, and he is aware that he was cruel to Wei Wuxian as well, but his grandmother was the worst. And right now, she’s hurting him too much.

“A-Ling!” Jin Zixuan scolded, wiping his son’s tears. “Do not say such things.”

‘Do not say such things? But that was the truth! She really is cruel!’ Jin Ling thought and looked away from his father. Jiang Yanli embraced him while also crying, not uttering a word.

‘A-Ling,’ Wei Wuxian smiled sadly. *‘You’re still a crybaby.’*

Finally, after all that torture, Yu Ziyuan's Zidian returned to its ring form, while Wei Wuxian trembles on the floor, spasms occasionally wrecking his body.

‘Too bad,’ an unknown cultivator sighed. ‘*He needed more of that whipping’*

It was finally over.

'It's not over yet,' Cangse Sanren thought heatedly.

They could finally breathe normally again. Some cultivators collapsed into their seats. Some were still processing what had happened, others were nauseous, and some were silently relieved to see Yiling Laozu in pain.

"Wei Wuxian!" Jiang Wanyin called out, but Jinzhu and Yinzhu still held him back.

Jiang Wanyin should have made a more concerted effort to escape. He could've saved his brother from the punishment. His back would've been okay if he tried to…

"Hm?" Wang Lingjiao hummed, tilting her head. "Is that all?"

"T-That's—"

"Are you serious?" Qingheng-jun asked in disbelief. "He's injured enough; do you want more blood spilled?"

"If she touches him again, I'll find her in the afterlife and kill her again," Madam Jin vowed.

"What else do you want?!" Jiang Wanyin shouted, surprised by Wang Lingjiao's implied demand.

"Madame Yu, since this is a punishment, he has to keep this lesson in mind forever."

Growling, Wei Changze demanded, "What are you implying?!"

"What do you want?" Yu Ziyuan asked.

Wang Lingjiao smirked, “Wen-er-gongzi is so merciful that he’ll let it pass if you cut off a hand of Wei Wuxian.”

Horrified gasps escaped from the cultivators’ mouths. Some had to cover their mouths, sickened by the image of Wei Wuxian's hand being severed.

“What?!” Both Cangse Sanren and Wei Changze shouted indignantly.

“How dare you suggest such a thing?!” Xiao Xingchen demanded, his face worried, and turned to face Wei Wuxian. “You wanted Madam Yu to punish him and now you’re demanding to cut his hand off?”

The cultivators should not be concerned right now. Wei Wuxian in the past still had his two hands, but the thought of losing one is still nauseating.

“Cut his hand off?” Yu Ziyuan asked.

“That’s right,” Wang Lingjiao responded with a smirk. “Then we’ll drop the matter.”

“Y-You…” Sizhui muttered, his body shaking in uncontrollable anger.

“I hope she’s being burned alive in hell right now,” Mianmian cursed and some agreed. She was demanding too much, even though she knew she shouldn't.

“Wretched woman! You’re just paying off private grudges!” Jiang Wanyin exclaimed furiously, breaking free from the two maids' grip and sprinting to his brother's side.

“Back off!” Yu Ziyuan warned, causing his son to come to a halt.

“A-Niang,” Jiang Yanli whispered from where she sat. “No-no, please don’t—”

“I did not do anything to him!” Yu Ziyuan shouted back. “I didn't sever his hand!”

Slowly, Yu Ziyuan began approaching the injured Wei Wuxian. As she did, her son followed her orders, but he kneeled on the floor.

“Mom, please,” he begged. “Things aren't what she said at all.”

“Young Master Jiang, are you accusing me of lying?”

He flinched back, looking down.

Even if Jiang Wanyin wanted to protect his brother, he couldn't do much. He wasn't talented enough; he wasn't the sect leader yet; he was still ignorant of other things; he had a lot to learn, but at the time, he wished he had everything to protect his home, his family, and his brother.

“Madam Yu, think this through,” she suggested. “The matter at hand, the Wen Sect will definitely get to the bottom of it. With his hand chopped off for me to bring back, it’d be a good explanation, and the YunmengJiang Sect would be fine. Or else, the next time when Wen-er-gongzi asks, things wouldn’t be so simple anymore!”

“Are you seriously listening to her right now, Ziyuan?!” Madam Jin demanded. “You’re better than this!”

“So, what was I supposed to do? Put my clan in danger just because I didn't give her what she wanted?!”

A cold light flashed through Yu Ziyuan's eyes. Her voice was eerie as she ordered, "Jinzhu, Yinzhu, quick, go close the doors. Don't let the others see the blood."

As soon as he heard the sounds of doors closing, Wei Wuxian's fear arise, *'Don't tell me that she's really going to chop off one of my hands?'*

Several hearts stopped at the same time.

"She's not going to, is she?" A Nie disciple anxiously asked.

"Wei-xiong will be fine," Nie Huaisang responded after hearing his disciple. "Though I'm sure she didn't manage to cut his hand off because of the supervisory office."

The light in the room slowly dimmed. Yu Ziyuan stepped directly in front of Wei Wuxian.

Wei Wuxian was forced to look up. While Yu Ziyuan's face was filled with resentment, Wei Wuxian's eyes were filled with terror and innocence they had never seen from him before.

Lan Wangji embraced his husband tightly, anguishedly repeating *'Wei Ying'* several times.

Lan Wangji's unconcealed distress makes Wei Wuxian want to cry. This was also one of the reasons he didn't want everyone to watch his memories; it would put a huge burden on them, and he didn't want everyone's pity. But this was his husband, he knew better.

"Lan Zhan, I am here."

"Mom? Mom!" Jiang Wanyin scared to death, continued to beg. "What are you doing? Please stop this!"

After the fear had passed, Wei Wuxian clenched his teeth, his heart set, 'Let it be, then! If it's an exchange for the peace of the sect, a hand is just a hand. Fuck, if the worst happens, I'll just practice with a left-handed sword from now on!'

He was willing to sacrifice his hand as well—that's how deep his loyalty to the sect was. A loyalty befitting a messed-up sect.

"That cannot happen!"

"A hand is just a hand?!" Wei Changze repeated, turning to his son angrily. "Don't just accept it!"

'Why sacrifice so much when they gave you little?' Song Lan thought. *'Jiang Sect does not deserve your devotion.'*

Wang Lingjiao laughed and clapped her hands, impressed, "Madam Yu, I knew that you must be the most obedient subordinate of Qishan Wen Sect! Somebody, hold this brat down!"

"Ordering others around," Lan Xichen shakes his head. "How heinous."

"No need," Yu Ziyuan said as Jinzhu and Yinzhu walked over.

"Oh, so you're having your maids hold him down? That'd work too."

"Mom! Mom listen to me, I beg you!" Jiang Wanyin pleaded once more. "Don't cut off his hand. If father knew—"

"Shut up" Yu Ziyuan shouted. "So what if he knows? He'll kill me?"

Yes, what would he do if he discovered his wife had cut his head disciple's hand simply because she was told to? Perhaps he would be angry. He would be forced to bear the burden of atonement for her wife's sin. He may still respect her, but he will never forgive her.

Wang Lingjiao beamed, “Madam Yu, I just admire you so much! It looks like from now on, in the supervisory office, we’ll get along as well!”

Yu Ziyuan turned around and raised a brow, “Supervisory Office?”

When the cultivators saw the change in Yu Ziyuan's expression, hope began to return to their minds.

The disciples' eyes twinkled as they remembered Nie Huaisang's response earlier. He had only been speculating before, but his words were true after all. How smart!

Wang Lingjiao smirked, “Right, the Supervisory Office. This is also one of the reasons why I’m here. Wen Clan just issued a Surveillance Decree. From now on, a Supervisory Office will be set up in every city that will be commanded by the Qishan Wen Clan.”

Lan Qiren scoffed, “Surveillance Decree? What nonsense!”

“Spying and controlling other sects,” Qingheng-jun frowned. “Amazing, Wen Ruohan; my hatred for your clan has never been stronger.”

Lan Qiren wanted to chastise him for succumbing to rage and harboring hatred, but he stopped himself because it was pointless; even he is feeling what he is feeling right now.

When this is finished, he will punish himself.

“Due to several rebels from YunmengJiang Sect, Wen-er-gongzi doubted if Lotus Pier is qualified to be responsible for the Office.”

Standing up, Jiang Cheng snapped, “What Supervisory Office?! This is my sect!”

Wang LingJiao scrunched her brows, “Madam Yu, you must discipline your son properly. Since hundreds of years ago, all of the sects have been under the Wen Sect. In front of the Wen Sect's envoy, how could he say things like your sect and my sect? I had originally been hesitating. Lotus Pier is so old and it had brought out quite a few dissidents, so could it really take on the heavy responsibility of being a supervision office? But seeing how obediently you followed my orders and how your personality suits my taste, I've still decided to give this great honor to—”

There was an echoing slap.

Many cultivators gaped in shock, “Huh?!”

“What’s happening?” Wen Ning asked, perplexed and anxious.

The slap was shocking in both sound and force, and Wang Lingjiao was slapped with such force that she spun around a few times before collapsing to the ground, blood gushing out of her nose, her eyes widening.

“She slapped her,” a Lan disciple said, dumbfounded.

“She slapped her!” Jingyi and the rest of the cultivators cheered loudly.

“Madam Yu finally fought back!” The Jiang disciples jumped excitedly.

Some, including Cangse Sanren and Wei Changze, were taken aback. Even though it seemed like Yu Ziyuan was already planning to fight back after Wang Lingjiao explained it, they still

couldn’t believe it.

“Not bad,” Madam Jin praised, but Yu Ziyuan brushed it off.

“You!”

The few of the Wen Sect's disciples within the main hall were alarmed at once. All of them unsheathed their swords. With a wave of Yu Ziyuan's hand, a brilliant ring of purple light shot out of Zidian. A large portion of the disciples collapsed immediately.

“Yes!”

“That was so cool!”

“I can't believe I'm cheering for her now after being so angry about what she did earlier.”

“Well, as long as that bitch suffers, who cares who is slapping her?”

With all her elegance, Yu Ziyuan walked toward Wang Lingjiao and looked down at her. Suddenly, she bent down and grabbed Wang Lingjiao's hair. Pulling her up, she gave her another slap of wrath, "How dare you bitch?!"

She had been enduring this for too long. Right now, her face was twisted as she advanced toward Wang Lingjiao. Face swollen, Wang Lingjiao began to scream. Without holding back at all, Yu Ziyuan gave her another slap, cutting off her ear-piercing scream. She shouted, “You look at its owner before you hit a dog! You barged into my sect, and you want to punish my person in front of my face? What a thing you are, how dare you be so undisciplined?!”

The room became so loud with cheers. Despite this, there were some who remained silent. They admired Yu Ziyuan for fighting back, but what she had done to Wei Wuxian had not

been forgotten.

As she finished, she threw Wang LingJiao's head to the side. Like she considered it dirty, she took out her handkerchief and wiped at her hands. Jinzhu and YinZhu stood behind her, faces bearing the same smile of disdain as hers.

Jiang Fengmian smiled slightly, despite his displeasure with what had occurred. It irritated him at times that her wife fought back during their argument. However, it is refreshing to see his wife like this. Elders rarely fight unless they are out night-hunting. She is a fierce woman, but her cultivation is extremely high, and she is also exceptional at combat. He'd only ever seen her fight once, but this time, he's watching her again, and he's mesmerized.

Wang LingJiao covered her face with shaking hands, cheeks stained with tears, “How... How dare you do something like this?! Neither the OishanWen Sect nor the YingchuanWang Sect will let you go!!!”

Yu Ziyuan tossed her handkerchief on the ground before kicking her over, cursing, “Shut up! Such a scum of a maid-my MeishanYu Sect has roamed the cultivation world for hundreds of years, and I've never heard of some YingchuanWang Sect! Of which gutter did this menial sect crawl out?! Is it full of things like you?!”

Some cultivators snorted at the last question but quickly recovered when they realized the situation was serious.

Jiang Wanyin, on the other hand, was already helping Wei Wuxian. Both of them were speechless as they watched the scene unfold.

Yu Ziyuan tugged her hair once again, “You mentioned the superior and the inferior before me? Then let me teach you what superiority and inferiority mean! I am the superior, you are the inferior!”

The scene faded to white.

The memory had ended, and everything that happened began to sink in.

“That slap was well deserved,” a young man commented with a sigh.

“That was so satisfying!” A female cultivator laughed. “Oh, I'd pay to see her priceless expression again!”

“That’s what needs to be done when an inferior act like a superior!” an unknown cultivator shouted.

While the cultivators were cheering, Baoshan Sanren sighed. The truth of why Wei Wuxian switched cultivation is fast approaching. Only Wen Ning, Lan Wangji, and Jiang Wanyin were aware of it, but the rest of the world was not. She began to wonder how they would react.

Would it be similar to how they were angry with Yu Ziyuan for punishing Wei Wuxian and cheered when Yu Ziyuan fought back?

Would they still condemn him for using resentful energy, or would they kneel and apologize to Wei Wuxian?

She is looking forward to seeing it. But one thing is certain: these individuals are...

‘Hypocrites,’ Baoshan Sanren thought.

“Wei Wuxian,” Madam Lan called out, concern evident on her face. “A-Are you okay? That memory wasn't very... pleasant.”

Wei Wuxian, warmed by her concern, smiled, “I am okay, Madam Lan.”

“Are you sure?” Qingheng-jun asked, joining in on the conversation. “I wouldn't be surprised if that memory somehow...”

“Honestly,” he whispered as he took Lan Wangji's hand in his. “I just don’t want everyone to watch my memories. They were a lot of things I had gone through that might be disturbing to some, but I am also tired of people not believing me. I wanted my voice to be heard, my story to be known, and my beliefs to be understood. That’s why, I will endure again for these people to know.”

Qingheng-jun and Madam Lan can't help but feel sorry for him and admire him. They were glad that someone like him was together with their son.

“No matter what memory shows us, we will believe your story,” Madam Lan said, smiling.

“Yes,” Qingheng-jun concurred. “I think you’re not a bad person at all, Wei Wuxian.”

Wei Wuxian, on the verge of tears, bowed down to salute them. He wanted to say that they would regret believing him without knowing the whole story, but he’s selfish. He wished for this feeling to last.

“Thank you, Qingheng-jun, Madam Lan,”

Lan Wangji saluted on the side, overjoyed that there were now people who believed in his husband, and these people were his parents.

After the talk, Wei Wuxian went over to his parents and embraced them tightly.

“Ah, beautiful son,” Cangse Sanren whispered, gently stroking his son's hair. “My kind, selfless son, we love you much.”

Wei Wuxian smiled brightly as she broke the hug, “I love you both, too.”

Wei Changze caressed his son's cheeks and said, “A-Ying should never sacrifice himself again.”

Wei Wuxian leaned into it and sighed, “I cannot help it. I owe Jiang Clan so much.”

With the mention of the *‘Jiang Clan’*, Cangse Sanren’s expression turned dark, “You owe them nothing.”

“Jiang Fengmian chose to take you back to Lotus Pier,” Wei Changze interjected, “and taking you back means you're his responsibility. They provided you with shelter, food, and clothing, but that doesn't mean you owe them everything.”

“It was more than owing them everything,” Wei Wuxian answered, turning his eyes to his sister. “At Lotus Pier, I formed a bond; I owe Shijie for making me soup whenever I ask for it and comforting me when I’m sad or hurt; I owe Jiang Cheng for our friendship and brotherhood; and I owe Jiang-zongzhu and Yu-furen for training me and making me a talented disciple.”

‘Yeah, while also being punished for things you rarely or never did before,’ Wei Changze and Cangse Sanren thought at the same time before exchanging glances and sighing

“As I thought, you are so much like your mother,” Wei Changze said, quite amused.

“Of course, he is my son,” Cangse Sanren said, taking her son’s hand into hers. “"But A-Ying, you really enjoy making people worry about you; you made us think we’re walking into our deaths again.”

Wei Wuxian scratched his back and laughed sheepishly, “I’m sorry.”

Wei Changze smiled, “Don’t be.”

The three talked for a while, occasionally giving the Jiang Clan death glares. As soon as they finished their conversation, Wei Wuxian went back to his husband's side, who was waiting for him. Then the expressions of Cangse Sanren and Wei Changze dimmed.

"I'm going to talk with my Grandmaster."

"My love, I, too, want to fight for our son, but I don't think it's a good idea."

Cangse Sanren scoffed, "I can't just sit down and not let them suffer the way our son did. Did you even see how our son bled so much in the last memory? He could've died!"

"But, when you think about it, Yu Ziyuan didn't have much of a choice," Wei Changze reasoned. "She could have fought back if she had the option, but she couldn't endanger her clan either. You know that right?"

She despises the fact that her husband had a point.

"I'm going to talk with my Grandmaster anyway."

Wei Changze sighed and drew her into his arms. "I really can't stop you, can I? Alright, you can go."

While Baoshan Sanren was in her room (she had left the cultivators in the main hall for some peace of mind), her thoughts returned to Wei Wuxian's core. According to what she felt after imitating it, the core is very strong, which is a good thing because it would be easier to put it back together. What she's concerned about is something else…

'Incompatible things,' she thought as she examined the talisman in her hand. *'It would be difficult, but I'll have to try. Perhaps I'll discover something too.'*

Then, the sound of a door opening jolted her out of her thoughts and turned around to see her disciple.

“Cangse Sanren,” she said. “I'm certain you’re here to talk about something.”

Bowing, Cangse Sanren solemnly responded, “Yes, this humble disciple wishes to borrow her Grandmaster's ears for a moment.”

Chapter End Notes

Ah, the angst is near, we all love and hate it.

Anyway, I'm having trouble with Yu Ziyuan's and other characters' character development because their characters are distinct but somewhat complex. I'm afraid I'm not going to do any character development at all, but this is just a temporary feeling, and I may change my mind later.

Also, because I am working with a beta reader, there may be minor changes to all of the chapters, (but nothing too major) so that is all.

See you in the next update!

Fall of Lotus Pier

Chapter Notes

> Hello, everyone! I am back! I am sorry for not uploading this chapter quickly. I just finished my OJT three days ago, and I had to polish this chapter before I could publish it. Anyway, I hope that with this chapter, everyone is happy, as I will be happy too!
>
> Enjoy reading!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Bowing deeply, Cangse Sanren declared reverently, "This disciple humbly seeks audience with her Grandmaster."

Baoshan Sanren studied her disciple for a moment before giving a curt nod and saying, "Speak."

"I wish to have a duel with Yu Ziyuan," Cangse Sanren promptly said, her eyes burning with fervor.

Baoshan Sanren empathizes profoundly with the burning anger that a mother might feel. Despite this, a duel cannot ensue in the current setting where numerous cultivators are present. The prevailing circumstance demands that the memory viewing must finish before any confrontation can take place. Consequently, Baoshan Sanren gazed deeply into the room with no particular focus.

"I give you permission to do so, but only after the memories are done showing," Baoshan Sanren said, causing Cangse Sanren's brows to wrinkle in perplexity and annoyance.

"Grandmaster, may I inquire as to why?"

Baoshan Sanren let out a sigh, "I cannot allow a duel to disrupt the memory viewing; you're all here for that reason, not to fight each other."

“But, Grandmaster—”

“Cangse Sanren!” Baoshan Sanren interrupted, her voice swelling with authority. Cangse Sanren immediately lowered her head like a chastised dog. "I understand your anger and I sympathize with your desire to fight Yu Ziyuan for your son, but we mustn't take the risk of letting the two of you clash either in or outside this temple. You’re both powerful individuals, and—”

"But we can set up an isolation barrier for the both of us!" Cangse Sanren interjected. "Yu Ziyuan and I can fight inside that barrier to prevent unnecessary collateral damage and to limit the effects of battles to one's immediate surroundings, thereby keeping the rest of the cultivators safe."

“You’ve thought of this in advance,” Baoshan Sanren stated, and Cangse Sanren nodded.

"I have been contemplating on this matter for some time now. Furthermore, the talisman also possesses the potential to function as a protective barrier."

In truth, Baoshan Sanren harbors no objection to her disciple's request, and is, in fact, curious to witness firsthand the extent of their cultivation and prowess in combat. That being said, she had been preoccupied with the plan for quite some time now, which she intended to do only after the memory viewing will be concluded later. Initially, she had intended to test *the* plan before putting it into action, but the anguished and dejected state of her disciple was so profound that Baoshan Sanren found herself unable to resist their plea any further.

"Very well," Baoshan Sanren responded, her response eliciting a grin from Cangse Sanren. But the smile on her face disappeared as soon as she continued, "Nonetheless, the question remains - where exactly can we get a talisman that possesses the ability to create an isolation barrier? Without this crucial talisman, the possibility of proceeding with the scheduled duel is questionable at be—”

Without allowing her grandmaster to finish speaking, Cangse Sanren swiftly extracted a talisman from her sleeves and presented it to her.

Baoshan Sanren gave a glance at it and then a smile spread across her face as she asked, “Since when?”

"You already know that I admire you a lot, Grandmaster," Cangse Sanren said, smiling as well. “I have taken notice of your endeavors in creating talismans for various purposes. This has piqued my interest and led me to study talisman creation as well as the fields of cultivation and combat. Despite numerous attempts, I have faced setbacks and encountered failures along the way. Nonetheless, I continue to persist in my pursuit of mastery in creating talismans. That one," Cangse Sanren points at the talisman in her Grandmaster's hand, "is one of my creations, yet it remains untested."

“You did not test this out?” Baoshan Sanren inquired in confusion.

“Yes,” Cangse Sanren replied. “I made the talisman prior to Changze and I setting off *that* night for a night hunt."

Baoshan Sanren's breath staggered as her eyes widened in realization. “If only you had this talisman with you on the night of the hunt,” she muttered “Then you two wouldn’t have died. This talisman would’ve protected you and Changze.”

Cangse Sanren replied with an unreadable expression, "Most likely," she said. "Still, I never got to try that talisman out, so using it in the middle of the fight was too risky."

“Why?” Baoshan Sanren whispered, her body shaking with rage and her expression shifted between incredulity and frustration as she continued her vehement question, “Why did you not tell me about this talisman?! Why did not use this talisman on *that* night hunt?! If you had taken the risk of using this that night, then the results would have been different!”

Cangse Sanren bowed lowly, “I’m sorry.”

“Had you decided to utilize this talisman, you would have been able to witness the growth and development of your son while simultaneously shielding him from the nefarious elements of the world that aimed to corrupt his innocent nature.”

Upon hearing those words, a deep sorrow settled in Cangse Sanren's heart. She was suddenly overwhelmed by the recollection of her son's past struggles—a time when he was forced to fend for himself on the streets, battling dogs and struggling to stay alive. The memory came flooding back, and Cangse Sanren, finding it difficult to contain her emotions, had to close her eyes for a moment to hold back her tears. She couldn't help but think of how different things could have been if only she and Changze had been able to complete their night hunt and return home with their son. Sadly, fate had other plans, and both of them met a brutal end.

“Repeated attempts are crucial to achieving success despite previous failures,” Baoshan Sanren said, finally calming down and feeling awful for scolding her disciple. She understands why her disciple did not use this talisman. It seems that the talisman requires a large amount of spiritual energy while also having a high energy consumption rate, as it drains the person's energy when activating a barrier for a long period of time. Given the perilous nature of fighting fierce corpses, the risk of low energy is significantly high, which could ultimately lead to underperformance on the battlefield.

But still, she could’ve tried..

Well, we shouldn’t let negative emotions take over when reflecting on the past. Unfortunate events do happen and it's best to focus on moving forward.

“I’m sorry, Grandmaster,” Cangse Sanren conveyed with a deeper bow than her former one.

“Stand straight,” Baoshan Sanren commanded and sighed before Cangse Sanren obediently complied without any hesitation. “Now, let’s test the efficacy of a mystical talisman.”

Cangse Sanren’s eyes widened, “Now?”

“Yes,” Baoshan Sanren said and extended her arm to give the talisman to their disciple. She expressed her curiosity, saying, “Let’s see if this will work.”

Cangse Sanren’s looked down on the talisman clenched in her hand, she couldn't help but feel a sense of unease sweep over her. Despite the uncertainty looming ahead, Cangse Sanren took a deep breath, reminding herself of the reason for her resolve. Yu Ziyuan may be a formidable opponent, but there was no turning back now—Cangse Sanren was determined to seek retribution for her beloved son and was willing to give it her all, even if the outcome was less than favourable.

As Cangse Sanren began the process of activating the talisman, an intense focus washed over her. She closed her eyes and began to channel her spiritual energy towards the talisman. However, it had been some time since Cangse Sanren had last used her spiritual energy, and she found herself struggling with the activation of the talisman. Beads of sweat began to form on her forehead, a testament to the exertion she was experiencing. Baoshan Sanren, who had been observing her disciple's efforts, knew that this was not uncommon—even the most skilled cultivators can struggle with using their energy if they have not done so in a while. Nonetheless, Baoshan Sanren had complete faith in Cangse Sanren’s capabilities. After all, Cangse Sanren was renowned in her time for her exceptional cultivation, and her legacy continued to inspire others long after she had departed.

A moment had passed, and after carefully channeling her power into the talisman, it gradually started to levitate from her hand. In anticipation of the imminent activation of the talisman, Cangse Sanren's eyes snapped open as she instinctively propelled the glowing talisman towards the middle of the room. The talisman illuminated the room with a dazzling brightness. Before long, a blue dome-shaped barrier sprang to life, encasing the very space where the talisman now rested.

Cangse Sanren let out a deep breath of relief as she murmured, "I-It worked".

Boashan Sanren takes a few steps forward to approach the barrier, her eyes fixed intently upon it as she seeks to gain a more thorough understanding of its intricacies and properties.

“This barrier is quite small with the capacity to accommodate only three to four individuals at once,” Baoshan Sanren said as she walked around barrier, examining it closely. “The barrier's manifestation time needed improvement as well.”

Cangse Sanren diligently noted all the observations her grandmaster had stated.

“Now let’s try something else.”

Confused, Cangse Sanren whispered, “Huh?”

Without a warning, Baoshan Sanren blasted an enormous sphere of spiritual energy towards the barrier, causing a loud explosion and the whole temple to tremble upon the powerful impact. The nearby cultivators were taken aback when they felt the immense force of the energy that had been unleashed.

"W-What was that?!" Nie Huaisang shrieked, ducking behind his elder brother.

"That spiritual energy and that explosion could only have come from Baoshan Sanren," Jiang Fengmian speculated.

"What the hell is the Immortal doing?!" shouted Madam Jin.

Cangse Sanren's cough echoed in the room as she leaned back at the pillar, trying to steady herself. The force of her Grandmaster's attack had been tremendous, and the resulting burst of light was blinding, overwhelming her senses and causing her to collapse to the ground. Even as she struggled to regain her footing, she felt the entire temple shake from the force of the impact. Surely the other cultivators had taken notice by now.

After the intense commotion and the smoke settled down, Cangse Sanren stared at Baoshan Sanren, who stood before the barrier, seemed utterly unscathed and amused. However, her attention quickly shifted to the barrier, which now bore a substantial crack that had originated from where the immense spiritual energy ball had collided with it.

“It’s quite sturdy too,” Baoshan Sanren observed and noticed a large crack despite being active for an extended period. “While acknowledging its success in serving its intended purpose, there’s room for improvement. A barrier should possess high flexibility and durability for it to be able to withstand various external forces and adapt to changing circumstances with ease.”

‘So, the motive behind the action was solely to test the fragility of the barrier at hand?’ Cangse Sanren thought.

Baoshan Sanren shifted her gaze towards Cangse Sanren, a smile spreading across her lips. She couldn't help but remark, "It's no surprise that Wei Wuxian was hailed as a prodigy in his prime; he inherited his exceptional talents from you."

Cangse Sanren smiled in response, “Of course, he’s my son.”

Baoshan Sanren let out a soft laugh before responding, "It seems that with this newly erected barrier, the possibility of you engaging in a duel with Yu Ziyuan is rendered null. However, there is still some room for improvement. I shall take matters into my own hands and make adjustments to the talisman you created so that it functions effectively. In the meantime, continue to improve."

Cangse Sanren expressed her gratitude towards her grandmaster for her kind and considerate gesture through bowing respectfully. She conveyed her heartfelt thanks by saying, "Thank you, Grandmaster."

‘It’s only fair for you to experience the consequences of your actions and feel the same pain you inflicted upon my son, Yu Ziyuan,’ she thought.

Moments later, Baoshan Sanren and Cangse Sanren made their way back to the main hall, ignoring the curious gazes that trailed them. As Cangse Sanren stood beside her beloved husband and son, along with Lan Wangji and his family, she let out a deep sigh.

“Don’t look at me like that. Grandmaster had to try something earlier,” Cangse Sanren blurted out.

They all cast a suspicious gaze towards her. Wei Changze, however, wanted answers from his wife, hoping for an immediate explanation, and Cangse Sanren shook her head, telling him that she would explain later.

“The memory viewing will continue,” Baoshan Sanren said and the cultivators immediately settled themselves down, eager and anticipating about the next scenes.

The sound of a shriek echoed through the air, drawing the attention of everyone present. Wang Lingjiao's body slammed down onto the ground, her eyes wide with shock and fear.

On the sidelines, Jiang Wanyin rushed to Wei Wuxian's aid, helping him regain his footing, his expression a mix of concern and disbelief. The sight before them left them both speechless, struggling to comprehend the sudden turn of events.

The Wen disciples, who had witnessed the scene before them, widened their eyes in shock. The sudden shriek and the sight of Wang Lingjiao's body being violently thrown to the ground left them stunned. When Yu Ziyuan turned to them, they felt a sense of danger emanating from the woman before them, but their fear and hesitation were overcome by a surge of courage. Without a second thought, the disciples charged forward.

Jingyi, who was overjoyed when he saw Wang Lingjiao being flung to the ground, smiled and exclaimed, “Y'all are so dead.”

The Wen disciples is not only attacking an ordinary cultivator—their target was none other than the legendary Violet Spider. Despite her reputation for being cold and assertive, she was widely known for being one of the most powerful and skilled cultivators around. And if that wasn't enough to intimidate her attackers, there was also the matter of her weapon, Zidian. Known to be one of the dangerous weapons in the cultivation world, encountering it in battle was sure to result in grave injury or even death for those foolish enough to take on its wielder.

Although Jingyi may have felt joy from the previous scene, his feelings of hatred towards the person in question remain strong. This sentiment is not unique to him as many other cultivators within the temple share the same negative view towards this Yu Ziyuan.

Yu Ziyuan sneered and turned her back on the charging Wen disciples, her confidence unwavering. In an instant, the purple ring on her finger transformed into a whip, crackling with electricity. As the whip made contact with the ground, it released a torrent of lightning, cascading like a waterfall and striking the charging disciples with a bolt of immense power. The force of the electrocution sent the disciples flying away from her, their bodies plummeting several meters before falling to the ground, unconscious.

"That was kinda cool," a Jiang disciple said as she gazed in wonder at the Violet Spider.

"I kinda agree," a Jin disciple said, nodding his head. "However, her previous actions were still unforgivable."

While listening to his fellow disciple, Jin Ling couldn't help but mentally agree with his statement. With his attention back on the screen, he couldn't deny that seeing his grandmother in action was quite thrilling because all his grandmother did in the past was punish his uncle (Wei Wuxian) and scold him while also fighting her husband.

Based on Jin Ling’s observations, the fighting style of Yunmeng Jiang greatly differed from that of Yu Ziyuan. Her style was fierce and swift, yet she also displayed a unique lethality akin to that of a spider. Jin Ling was especially impressed by his grandmother's calm demeanor in battle, even in the face of adversity (and even when one of the Jiang disciples went missing). Based on this, he was able to deduce that she also possessed exceptional tactical skills.

As Yu Ziyuan quickly glanced over her shoulder, Jinzhu and Yinzhu quickly deciphered her unspoken communication. Without hesitation, they unsheathe their gleaming swords and expertly maneuvered around the hall, taking out each and every one of the Wen Sect's disciples with lethal precision. In a matter of mere moments, the once bustling hall had fallen silent as the two successfully eliminated all Wen disciples.

Yu Ziyuan couldn't help but feel a deep sense of sadness upon Yinzhu and Jinzhu's deaths. Despite her own strength, she unfortunately failed to protect them. Though they served as her

maids, they held a special place in her heart and their loss has left a profound impact on her.

The fervent hope that she holds dear is that the eternal peace and tranquility of the afterlife have been bestowed upon the souls that she holds so dear.

A harrowing realization slowly crept up on Wang Lingjiao—she was the next target. Fear coursed through her veins, and she frantically began to crawl away in a desperate attempt to save herself. She threatened with the last of her strength, “You… I am Wen-er-gongzi’s woman. You think that you can silence me? You think Wen-er-gongzi doesn’t know that I’m here today? You think that he’ll let you go, after he knows about this?!”

"What happened to your bragging rights as a Wen Sect representative? Did it vanish into thin air?” Madam Jin teased.

"It probably teleported to another dimension," Jin Zixuan replied with a lighthearted chuckle. “But ugh, my embarrassment from this can't get any worse."

With a fierce expression, Yu Ziyuan exclaimed, “He’ll do what?!” and quickly took action. She whipped Zidian, causing it to coil tightly around Wang Lingjiao's neck, who then frantically struggled and gasped for air. With Yu Ziyuan's expert control, Zidian then swiftly retracted, dragging the struggling Wang Lingjiao all the way to Yu Ziyuan's feet in a forceful display of dominance.

Yu Ziyuan acted without any delay and promptly lifted her foot to apply pressure and crushing Wang Lingjiao's wrist. With a tone that evoked both ridicule and sarcasm, she further expressed, “He’ll cut off my hand? Burn down our residence? Lead thousands of disciples to raze Lotus Pier to the ground and build a supervision office?!”

Jiang Fengmian, Wei Wuxian, and Jiang Wanyin instinctively flinched as they processed the implications of Yu Ziyuan’s words.

To say those words had implications on them when it truly happened…

The fact that Lotus Pier did meet its end on that same day…

Yu Ziyuan feels regret washing over her as she mentally sighs and wishes she could take back the words. She did know what was going down after she said those words, but still…

“A-Niang,” Jiang Wanyin called, supporting Wei Wuxian so that they could both approach her.

Just as the boys were about to proceed further, a sudden, piercing scream echoed through the air, followed by a gruesome splatter of blood which stained the once-pristine wall. In the blink of an eye, the sturdy door was ruthlessly smashed down, and the imposing figure of Wen Zhuliu entered their line of sight, radiating an aura of danger and malice.

“Wen Zhuliu?!” Wei Changze gasped in shock. Wen Zhuliu’s power is terrifying. He possessed the rare and distinct talent to obliterate the core of anyone he touched with but a mere graze of his hand.

If he’s here, then..

In a hushed voice, Wen Qing shared her concern, “They’re in trouble.”

This is also one of the reasons why she preferred to keep at a distance; it was due to his particular demeanor that she found unnerving. Although she had no reason to believe that he would harm her without direction from Wen Chao or Wen Ruohan, the mere presence of Wen Zhuliu made her feel uneasy. She couldn't help but sense a certain unpredictability about him that left her on edge.

As the minutes passed, Jiang Fengmian's anxiety began to escalate and a sense of guilt slowly crept up his spine. He’s angry at himself for leaving his family alone at Lotus Pier. Looking beside him, Jiang Fengmian couldn't help but notice that his wife was completely immersed in the unfolding events and remained oblivious to his growing apprehension.

Meanwhile, Nie Mingjue was visibly agitated, his lips curling downwards in a sneer. Despite his confidence in Yu Ziyuan's combat skills, he couldn't shake off the worry and anger gnawing at him.

Wen Zhuliu proved to be a formidable adversary. However, what occurred after this particular scene greatly amplified Nie Mingjue's fury and resentment towards him.

“Core-Melting Hand?” Yu Ziyuan said darkly.

“Violet Spider,” Wen Zhuliu responded with the same sentiment.

This particular situation stood in stark contrast to fighting against Wang Lingjiao. This was a serious clash of power between two of the most formidable cultivators of their time. Their gazes were so intense that they sent shivers down the spines of the cultivators in the hall. They began to feel a sense of unease, their hearts pounding heavily in their chests.

With obvious concern and a tinge of uncertainty, Sizhui posed a question to Wen Ning, “Was he there the whole time?”

Wen Ning thought, though the specific cause of his cousin's unease remained unclear, it was possible that the sudden appearance of Wen Zhuliu had contributed to it in some way. In the current scenario, given that Wei Wuxian is injured and Jiang Wanyin is not capable enough to confront Wen Zhuliu—he must prioritize taking care of his brother. This leaves only three individuals, namely the Violet Spider, Yinzhu, and Jinzhu, who are in a position to face Wen Zhuliu and engage in a battle against him.

"Wen Zhuliu never leaves Wen Chao’s side," Jiang Wanyin recalled. "Why—"

Wei Wuxian clenched his teeth as realization dawned upon him, "Shit!"

"The Wens had already planned to attack Lotus Pier," Jiang Yanli replied sadly in response to Sizhui's question. "The Wens were already on standby when Wang Lingjiao entered the Main Hall."

Anticipating this moment for some time now, Jiang Yanli's heart constricted, causing her to struggle to breathe for a bit. However, with her husband's comforting touch on her hand, she made a conscious effort to steady her nerves. With her composure regained, she then shifted her focus to the screen in front of her.

Jiang Yanli is consumed with worry for her mother. While Jinzhu and Yinzhu serve as trusted and capable protectors, despite being maids, even they may not be capable enough to take down a skilled and powerful cultivator like Wen Zhuliu.

But then, Jiang Yanli couldn't help but wonder if her fate would be similar to her if she was there. Recalling what happened, she remembered the time when she had entered a battlefield with the sole purpose of speaking to her brother. However, her selfless act eventually led to her tragic demise. Although she knew that her death would cause immense pain to her beloved siblings, the overwhelming desire to protect Wei Wuxian overshadowed the value of her own life. It was a truly sacrificial move that underscored the depth of her love and loyalty towards her family.

If she were there, she'd probably try to protect her family, too, even despite being weak.

One of Wang Lingjiao's hands were still crushed by Yu Ziyuan's foot. She felt so much pain that her features looked twisted, tears smeared all over as she screamed, "Wen Zhuliu! Wen Zhuliu! Help me, help me now!"

Nie Huaisang snickered, "It's sad that she's now trying to get help from someone who clearly has no regard for her."

"Apparently, she's more shameless than Wei Wuxian," Jiang Wanyin remarked.

Wei Wuxian, who had remained quiet all this time, clutched his chest with a dramatic flair and mock-queried, "Why is my name being brought up again?!"

“Isn't your real name Zhao Zhuliu?” Yu Ziyuan snorted. “Your surname was plainly not Wen, yet you changed it nonetheless. Is the surname of those Wen-dogs truly priceless? How absurd it is to turn your back on your forefathers!”

Wen Zhuliu remained unswayed, seemingly indifferent, “Each serves their own master.”

Yu Ziyuan’s brows twitched in annoyance, *‘Way to show your loyalty, Core-Melting Hand.’*

“Yeah, bravo for your unwavering loyalty, Wen Zhuliu,” a female cultivator scoffed. “This shows how fucking good you are as one of Wen Ruohan’s dogs!”

A wave of amusement washed over some of the cultivators causing them to burst into unrestrained laughter, however, there were also those who remained quiet, deeply affected by the cutting remark.

Meanwhile, Wei Wuxian shivered hearing the word, *‘dog’*

In the meantime, while Wen Zhuliu remained motionless and apathetic, Lan Xichen couldn't help but draw parallels to his own brother, and perhaps some of his family feels the same way, as evidenced by the way they were gazing intently at Wen Zhuliu.

Yu Ziyuan and Wen Zhuliu had just exchanged a few words, yet Wang Lingjiao was unable to bear it any longer and screamed, "Wen Zhuliu! Don’t you see what I look like? Why are you chit-chatting instead of killing her right now? Is this how Wen-er-gongzi told you to protect me? Watch out, or else I’ll denounce you!"

“How many times should I feel disgusted today? With just one person, no less,” Mianmian grimaced.

“A thousand times for sure,” Jin Zixuan nonchalantly responded.

Yu Ziyuan applied additional force on her foot, and Wang Lingjiao couldn't help but let out a cry of pain. In contrast, Wen Zhuliu's expression tightened as he furrowed his brow.

The noticeable hesitation in Wen Zhuliu's demeanor indicated an intense disregard for Wang LingJiao. Even though he harbors negative sentiments towards Wen Chao, his sense of obligation restrains him from carrying out any harm against Wang LingJiao. However, it's apparent that Wen Zhuliu is not willing to shield Wang Lingjiao either.

“Then why offer your loyalty to the Wens?” Madam Lan asked in confusion.

“Wen Zhuliu shows the utmost loyalty to Wen Ruohan, claiming that he owes his clan leader a *‘debt of generosity’*.” Lan Qiren responded coldly.

Yet, in such a situation, the woman was on the verge of losing her life. If he did nothing, Wen Chao would definitely fly into a rage and refuse to let him go. And if he refused to let him go, then Wen Ruohan wouldn't leave the matter at that either.

This was quite vexing indeed...

“I have to agree,” Song Lan said, observing the two cultivators on the screen.

“Excuse me,” Wen Zhuliu said before he charged towards Yu Ziyuan with a fierce determination, Wen Zhuliu's hand emitted an ominous dark red glow. The glow seemed to be accompanied by whips of electricity, crackling and surging with power.

Before Wen Zhuliu could get close to Yu Ziyuan, Zidian abruptly lunged forward and fiercely struck him. Yu Ziyuan skillfully took a defensive stance while Wen Zhuliu reciprocated with swift and calculated attacks. The two engaged in a graceful yet

intense dance of dodging, parrying and counter-attacking, moving with such fluidity that their movements were almost blur-like in their speed.

In a sudden motion, Wen Zhuliu's large hand swiftly extended towards Zidian and in a feat of impressive dexterity, he effortlessly secured a firm grip on it.

Jin Ling stood up in shock and said, "How is that possible?! Even a powerful cultivator would've passed out just grabbing Zidian like that!"

Zidian, a conduit for spiritual energy, is enveloped in a potent flow that possesses the capability to be either formidable or feeble, perilous or trivial, contingent upon the prowess of its wielder. Yu Ziyuan had harbored a deep-seated desire to eliminate both the Wen-dogs but also in caution of Wen Zhuliu. Consequently, the energy coursing through Zidian was surging at full throttle when Wen Zhuliu grabbed it without any difficulty!

Remembering this scene, Jiang Wanyin was consumed with an overwhelming sense of fury, leading him to clench down hard on his teeth. Amidst his frustration, he notices his sister, Jiang Yanli, and his father, Jiang Fengmian, who appear to grow increasingly anxious with every passing moment.

"Wen Zhuliu's unique power can neutralize the effect of Zidian," Yu Ziyuan explained, her expression unreadable. "Well, he's probably feeling the power of Zidian, but he's tolerating it."

"That's so unfair!" Jingyi shouted in annoyance because Wen Zhuliu is like rendering the effects of Zidian, much like how he can render a person unable to utilize their core. Wen Zhuliu's power was beyond Jingyi's comprehension. "How is he this strong?!"

After it had been grabbed, Yu Ziyuan paused for the slightest moment. Within the years of it being in use, Zidian had never met such an opponent. Whether by dodging it or simply knocking it aside, Zidian was continuously rendered useless before Wen Ruohan's strongest weapon.

As the moments ticked by, an atmosphere of unease descended upon the cultivators gathered in the room. Each person's heart seemed to contract in their chest, overwhelmed by a potent mixture of anxiety and anger that threatened to crush them from within. The thick tension in the air was palpable, and it was clear that something drastic was about to happen.

“What…” Zizhen muttered as his body began to shake. “What are they gonna do now?”

As Yu Ziyuan's attention was momentarily diverted, Wang Lingjiao sprang into action, deftly making her escape. She didn't waste any time and swiftly retrieved a cylindrical container of fire-light from her pocket. She gave it a few shakes until a brilliant light burst forth from it. Accompanied by a sharp, piercing whistle, the fiery projectile shot out of the wooden window with incredible speed, exploding in a spectacular display of color and light in the sky above.

It was a signal flare.

“**Stop her!” Wei Wuxian shouted, pushing Jiang Cheng forward through his pain. “She’s sending a signal!”**

Dread washed over the cultivators.

“Fuck!” an unknown cultivator cursed. “She should’ve been killed in the beginning!”

Meanwhile, the present Yu Ziyuan clenched her jaw as she regretted not taking action when she should have. However, even if she had taken action, it's unlikely that it would have made a significant difference as the Wen Sect was already closing in on Yunmeng with the intention of annihilating them all. Therefore, even if Yu Ziyuan had acted differently, it's unlikely that her actions would have altered the outcome of the situation.

Beyond the boundary of Yunmeng were hordes of boats, thickly clustered and rapidly approaching the docks of Lotus Pier,

The army had arrived.

“No,” Jiang Yanli whispered in horror.

With a proud and malicious expression etched on his face, Wen Chao stood tall on the deck of one of the boats. From his vantage point, he issued an order with a deep and commanding voice, “Wipe out Lotus Pier! Spare no one!!”

The room was abuzz with the fury emanating from the majority of the Jiangs present, particularly Yu Ziyuan and Jiang Wanyin. The latter, whose intense indignation was palpable, caused Zidian to flicker erratically on his fingertip, a clear reflection of its master's wrath.

"Wen Clan," Xiao Xingchen hissed under his breath, his eyes filled with fury.

On the contrary, the younger members of the clan were experiencing immense fear and concern for both the brothers and Yu Ziyuan. Despite their past confrontations with various adversaries and creatures during their night hunts, nothing had prepared them for a catastrophe of such magnitude: the complete obliteration of a sect. Even though they were steadfast in their determination to defend their clan from ruin, the Wen Clan and their most formidable asset, Wen Zhuliu, posed an insurmountable threat. In such a severe situation, their chances of survival were infinitesimal.

“This is so cruel,” a disciple from the Lan sect whispered in a sorrowful tone while gripping their sword firmly.

Back to the main hall, Jiang Wanyin released his hold on Wei Wuxian and immediately lunged towards Wang Lingjiao. Simultaneously, Wen Zhuliu was making his way closer towards Wang Lingjiao as well, narrowing the distance between them.

He looked as if he was about to knock her down, but then Jiang Wanyin hurried, “A-Niang!”

He immediately gave up on Wang Lingjiao and threw himself over. Wen Zhuliu didn’t even turn his head as he defended himself. He struck Jiang Wanyin’s shoulder, and blood burst from his mouth before he fell onto the ground.

“A-Cheng!!”

“Jiujiu!!”

Jiang Yanli, Jiang Fengmian, and Jin Ling exclaimed at the same time. With a swift movement, they instinctively moved to shield him from harm, but quickly realized the futility of their actions.

Yu Ziyuan's frustration was palpable as she struggled to find a release for the anger that had built up inside her. The careless and mindless actions of her son had triggered an impulse in her to choke someone, to lash out and let the fury take over. She knew that scolding him was not enough to fix the situation at hand. The threat to Lotus Pier was imminent and her son almost lost his core, and now the Wen Clan is on their way to destroy Lotus Pier.

Seeing her son hurt, Yu Ziyuan’s anger intensified.

The light emanating from Zidian grew more radiant that it grew almost blindingly white in hue. In a split second, Wen Zhuliu was hurtling back, his body colliding violently with the wall due to the sheer force of Zidian's sudden eruption.

Despite Yu Ziyuan's desire to inflict further harm upon Wen Zhuliu, she urgently pivoted and dashed towards the door, forcefully skidding outside to gain a vantage point over the lakes where the rest of the army had gathered.

In the distance, Wen Zhuliu had left the main hall and covered for Wang Lingjiao’s retreat.

Nie Mingjue and Qingheng-jun were frustrated as they clenched their fists. While they deeply understood the significance of safeguarding the clan and prioritizing its people, they could not help but feel disapproving of Yu Ziyuan's decision to let the pair go that easily without a fight.

With an army fast approaching, Yu Ziyuan needed to act fast to protect Lotus Pier, even without Jiang Fengmian’s command and presence.

Seeing Wen cultivators approaching in the sky, Yu Ziyuan issued a quick but firm command, “Initiate the shield formation!!”

The spectators gazed up at the skies of Lotus Pier, their attention was drawn to the stunning display that unfolded before them. Nine distinct areas glimmered and shimmered with a pulsing energy, gradually intensifying until they radiated with an otherworldly brilliance. The energy streams then slowly converged towards the center, gradually culminating in a breath-taking barrier that encased the area in an intricate and beautiful formation resembling a delicate, purple lotus bloom.

The cultivators and other disciples were amazed and awe-struck at the sight before them. The terrifying and exquisitely beautiful spectacle left them gaping in wonderment. Although the disciples had come across various barriers during their night hunts, the sight of Yunmeng Jiang's barrier working in action was completely new and unparalleled to them.

Then, realization has dawned upon them regarding the gravity and brutality of this memory. The impact of this realization has left them unsure and apprehensive about how to cope with it.

As Wei Wuxian watched the memory unfold before him, he was wracked with a profound sense of guilt and overwhelming sadness. A complex array of emotions weighed heavily on him, not least of which was the crushing realization that he himself would bear witness to the unraveling of his beloved home, and the inevitable downfall of his foster parents of his dear brother. Fueled by remorse, he couldn't shake the nagging feeling that had he not been injured at that critical moment in time, he would have been able to make a positive contribution instead of feeling like a mere burden. If only he were not injured, he could’ve—

“Whatever you’re thinking, stop that,” Jiang Wanyin warned without even looking at his brother.

Confused on how his brother knew what he’s thinking, he asked, “What are you—”

Jiang Wanyin replied, his words echoing with a profound sense of solemnity, "I can hear your thoughts even from miles away, as clear as a bell." He cast his gaze upon his brother, his eyes revealing a wealth of emotions that were indescribable. With a heavy sigh, he continued, "No one is to blame for what happened. The attack was something that was bound to happen, and we couldn't have prevented it."

Lan Wangji tightened his grip on his husband's waist, as if he agreed with Jiang Wanyin's statements.

The very moment the barrier made contact with the ground, the first troop of Wen disciples arrived, and they abruptly came to a halt. The barrier stood as an obstacle on their path. Consequently, they began to float outside the barrier, unable to advance further.

Then, the leader commanded, “Converge spiritual energy!”

Jiang Fengmian stood there, gazing intently at the situation before him, and he felt a rush of emotions flood his mind. He was going to witness the downfall of his clan and his wife, and he knew it required him to be strong and composed. With that in mind, he took a deep, steadying breath, allowing himself to calm his nerves. He needed to mentally prepare himself for the events that were about to unfold, so he focused intently on the scene, observing every detail of the attack that was about to take place without his involvement.

Golden arrays materialized in mid-air, came hurtling down and colliding into the solid, purple barrier with a loud thud.

Lan Qiren's eyes narrowed as he carefully observed the scene in front of him, taking in every detail. He knew that Yunmeng Jiang's protective barrier was particularly strong, having been infused with powerful spiritual energy over many years. Despite this, the golden arrays that

the Wen disciples had brought with them were simply too numerous for the barrier to withstand. Lan Qiren sighed deeply, recognizing the inevitable outcome of this situation all too well.

First, it was Gusu Lan Sect that was attacked, and next was Yunmeng Jiang Sect. It is not a surprise to him that Qinghe-Nie will be next.

Meanwhile, Cangse Sanren observed the barrier closely, she was struck by a realization that the barrier possessed all the characteristics that her Grandmaster had pointed out earlier. It was as if her Grandmaster's words had come to life right in front of her eyes, and she could almost feel a sense of clarity wash over her as she made this connection.

'I'll take note of this,' she thought intently.

Back on the bridge, Wei Wuxian and Jiang Wanyin had joined Madam Yu in looking over at the lakes and the barrier. Jiang Wanyin helped Wei Wuxian by holding him up, so that he could stand still.

"A-Niang, what…?" Jiang Cheng began, eyes wide and fearful.

"Don't fret," Yu Ziyuan responded. "Our Yunmeng Jiang Clan's protective barrier will not be easily breached by the Wens."

"I don't think so," Nie Huaisang responded solemnly. "Looking at it, it appears that the barrier will collapse or be penetrated at any moment."

Yu Ziyuan and Jiang Wanyin can't even dispute with Nie Huaisang since they know he's right.

Even as the onslaught of golden arrays persisted, repeatedly smashing into the Jiang Sect's impervious barrier, the fortitude of the protective shield proved to be unyielding.

Each array that made contact with the barrier failed to leave even the slightest crack or dent, a testament to the formidable strength of the barrier.

“Tsk!” Wen Chao scoffed from his boat. “Pointless resistance! Pass my order; keep up the onslaught! Today, we must destroy Lotus Pier!”

“Understood!”

Jin Ling and Jin Zixuan were overwhelmed with emotions as they found themselves clenching their fists in an attempt to control their mounting anger and anxiousness.

On the side, Qingheng-jun and Madam Lan couldn't help but express feeling of sadness as they observed the dire situation Yu Ziyuan and her disciples were in. Though they had somehow anticipated the fate awaiting Yu Ziyuan, it was still a pitiful sight to watch her being the only one leading her disciples in the battle to defend their clan. They couldn't help but sympathize with her. Nevertheless, they held onto hope that some of the disciples would be able to make it out alive.

Far away, in the serene, star-speckled lake, Jiang Fengmian looked down at the hairpin in his hand. As he examined it more closely, he realized that the shattered piece had been skillfully mended, almost imperceptible in its flawless restoration.

Upon seeing the hairpin, Yu Ziyuan's eyes widened in a brief moment of surprise. Despite her initial rejection of accepting the hairpin, she couldn't help but feel conflicted emotions upon realizing the effort that Jiang Fengmian had gone through to get it repaired. For a moment, she could feel the weight of someone's gaze upon her and knew it belonged to one person. Despite this, she stood tall and resolutely avoided making eye contact, refusing to allow her emotions to get the best of her.

Despite her efforts to conceal her true feelings, Jiang Fengmian was keenly aware of the sudden shift in her emotions. However, he wisely chose to remain silent, recognizing her tendency to value her pride, and although he longed to reach out and take her hand in his, the current circumstances made him hesitate, wondering if now was the appropriate moment to make such a gesture.

“Clan Leader,” a senior disciple spoke. “The jade hairpin looks even prettier after being repaired. I’m sure Yu-furen will like it.”

Jiang Fengmian smiled slightly.

Madam Jin's heart was consumed by jealousy. Why was Jin Guangshan not like this? In spite of not having romantic feelings for her, Madam Jin would have appreciate it had Jin Guangshan put in some effort to buy her gift or something.

If a person possesses wealth and does not utilize it to acquire their desired possessions, what is the true value of their affluence?

Tsk..

Then, a senior disciple hurriedly approached Jiang Fengmian and shouted, “Clan Leader, bad news!”

“What is it?” Jiang Fengmian inquired, apparently alarmed by his disciple's tone.

“Purple flames lit up the sky in Lotus Pier’s direction! It seems like the barrier was activated!”

“You all have to go back, now!” an unknown cultivator exclaimed.

Another cultivator piped in, “Please make it back in time!”

Wei Wuxian and Jiang Wanyin could only close their eyes in sadness.

In a state of disbelief and astonishment, Jiang Fengmian sprang up from his seat. He instinctively seized hold of his sword and motioned for his disciples to come with him.

“All disciples of Yunmeng Jiang Clan, follow me!” he commanded.

They sped through the air as fast as they could.

Jiang Fengmian let out a deep sigh of defeat. Despite his best efforts, he had finally made it back to Lotus Pier, only to discover that he had arrived too late.

He was not able to save his beloved wife and loyal disciples from the clutches of the ruthless Wen Clan.

“A-Die,” Jiang Yanli called. “I know you did everything in your power to reach there on time and protect the Sect. Remember, you didn't fail them, and your efforts were sincere. You gave it your all.”

Despite this, his daughter is trying to console him. But even with her words, he knew that he really failed to protect his everything, and the evidence was right before his eyes.

“I know, A-Li.”

Until now, the golden arrays relentlessly pounded against the barrier of the Jiang Sect, creating a deafening noise that echoed throughout the area. Despite the chaotic scene, Yu Ziyuan displayed a surprising level of composure as she stood there with a deep frown etched on her face. This was quite a stark contrast to her previous behaviour.

With a steadfast grip on his sword's hilt, Wei Wuxian expressed his concern, "The shield can't stand strong against the continuous Wens attacks for too much longer." After contemplating for a moment, he turned his gaze towards his brother, questioning, "Do you know when Uncle Jiang is expected to return?"

“Father won’t be back until the end of Xu Shi* (7-9pm),” Jiang Wanyin responded. “These damned Wens! They really picked a good timing to attack!”

Jiang Fengmian was consumed by overwhelming feelings of guilt and frustration. In retrospect, he realized he should have foreseen the recent upheaval starting from the initial assault by the Wens on the Gusu Lan Sect. Despite that, the intensity of this latest attack caught him off guard. Upon reflection, the reasoning behind the Wens' actions seemed entirely baseless and nonsensical. Their flimsy excuse—Wei Ying provoking the Wen Clan and injuring Wen Chao in order to strike back at him and Jiang Clan—was nothing if not absurd.

If only he did not leave…

Meanwhile, the nine Jiang seniors stationed in the nine areas diligently focused their energy at the center of the circle, tirelessly powering and stabilizing the protective barrier.

Suddenly, there was a movement, and they caught a glimpse of a vibrant flash of red in the background.

“No!!”

“Watch out!!”

With graceful movements as if he’s dancing, Wen Zhuliu skillfully shattered their very cores in an astonishingly short amount of time.

Countless cultivators instinctively gasped and covered their mouths as they beheld the unimaginable sight that stretched out before them. Their previously anxious expressions shattered into ones of utter disbelief, shock, and unbridled horror at the scene that lay before their very eyes.

Sizhui shouted as he stepped forward, “No, no!!”

“The barrier!!” Jingyi exclaimed.

With a sense of urgency in his voice, Wei Wuxian alerted, “The barrier!”

The realization dawned on them that they were too slow and couldn't take any effective action to stop it. All they could do now was spectate with a growing sense of dread and alarm as the barrier disintegrated right before their eyes. The once sturdy and formidable structure was now crumbling away into nothingness. The feeling of helplessness engulfed them as they watched their last line of defense slip away, leaving them exposed and vulnerable to what lay beyond.

Back on the boats, Wen Chao watched the collapsing barrier with unhidden joy. Upon hearing the Wen elder's announcement of the broken barrier, he promptly extended his hand and pointed towards the pier.

“Shoot!” he commanded.

Wei Changze observed the scene before him with a mixture of anger and fear brewing inside him. He could not hide his frustration and restlessness, and his eyes darted towards Jiang Fengmian, who was utterly engrossed in the unfolding events. Despite the fact that Wei Changze was still resentful towards Jiang Fengmian for failing to intervene when his son was in danger, he couldn't ignore the bond he shared with him as both a friend and former leader.

Despite feeling an overpowering impulse to draw his sword and fight off the Wens to defend his former dwelling place, he was left feeling helpless as he watched everything he held dear being destroyed before his very eyes.

Noticing the solemn look on Wei Changze's face, Cangse Sanren also shifted her gaze towards Jiang Fengmian. Her eyes held an unspoken query, which Jiang Fengmian instantly understood. He nodded in acknowledgment, although it was clear that neither he nor the other

members of the Jiang Clan were okay. The gravity of the situation was palpable, casting a tense aura that hung heavily in the air.

A vast multitude of flaming arrows, numbering no less than a million, cascaded from the skies and descended upon Lotus Pier in a spectacular display of fiery destruction, imbuing the once serene sky with a deep red hue.

The air was filled with ear-piercing cries, and arrows rained down mercilessly, snuffing out the lives of any Jiang disciples who happened to be within reach of their deadly trajectory.

Jiang Yanli and the other members of the Jiang Clan couldn't bear to watch any longer as they turned away from the gruesome scene before them. This was a brutal massacre, and what made it even more devastating was the fact that all of the fallen warriors were brave disciples who they had known for a long time now, and who they had personally trained to become skilled cultivators. Despite their unwavering dedication and determination to defend the clan, they had lost their lives in this vicious battle.

Jin Ling, Sizhui, and Jingyi stood firmly, their facial expressions distorted with anger. The sight before their eyes was so gruesome that they felt their own hearts contracting with anguish. The trio was eager to intervene and lend a helping hand, but they felt powerless and unable to do anything. The thoughts that their teacher had instilled in them came rushing back; the past was marred with blood being spilled everywhere. Where righteous, virtuous clans, with their hands clean, were dirtied and were forced to swim in the sea full of enemies, corpses, and blood. Where adversaries were the monsters and demons devouring the cultivation world with their absolute power.

“I-I am ashamed,” Sizhui whispered as he hung his head low.

“You have nothing to be ashamed of, Lan Sizhui,” Nie Huaisang said after hearing him. “The crimes committed by your Clan are the fault of the clan, not you.”

“Sect Leader Nie is right, A-Yuan,” Wen Qing said as she held her cousin’s hand tightly. “You are innocent, and you were still a child when the war happened.”

Sizhui could only remain silent, his mind is still in turmoil.

The brutal massacre persisted. The Wens ruthlessly ignited the wooden halls of Lotus Pier, setting the formerly serene land ablaze with a vibrant red hue that outshone even the Nightless City. As the fire rapidly spread, the once-sturdy buildings crumbled to the ground and the once-proud banners of Yunmeng Jiang were reduced to nothing but ashes.

Yu Ziyuan seethed in anger as she witnessed her beloved home being destroyed with disturbing ease, and exclaimed, "Damn Wen Dogs!"

Wei Wuxian and Jiang Wanyin were filled with anger, they also feel a deep sense of regret and grief for the disciples who were once a part of their lives during their childhood. These individuals were similarly young like Wei Wuxian and Jiang Wanyin, and it is disheartening to witness that they were stripped of the opportunity to live a long and fulfilling life. While they both feel a strong urge to seek vengeance for their fallen comrades, they already did it in the past.

"I'm sorry," Jiang Fengmian spoke, drawing Yu Ziyuan's attention.

"Even if you're to apologize now, it's over," Yu Ziyuan hissed. "Wen Clan had already planned everything ahead of time, and we were completely unaware of it; even if you arrived earlier in the fight, you and I both know we can't protect the Clan!"

Jiang Fengmian wanted to say something, but he found himself unable to form the appropriate response. His head sank down in contrition as he uttered another round of apologies.

In the midst of all this, Lan Qiren and Qingheng-jun sympathized with the two because despite their best efforts to safeguard GusuLan Clan against the Wen Clan's attack, both ultimately fell short of their goal, leaving them no choice but to acknowledge their shortcomings.

The Wen army landed, effortlessly slicing through the unprepared Jiang disciples. The Jiangs, though courageous in their efforts, appeared to be vastly outnumbered. One could hardly bear to watch as disciple after disciple fell to the ruthless blades of the Wen soldiers.

Blood was sprayed everywhere.

Wen Qing and Wen Ning closed their eyes. No, they were in no way involved in the vicious attack on the Jiangs, their focus lay on the field of medicine. Yet, as disciples under Wen Ruohan, they felt responsible and weighed down by the association with the horrific incident. It disgusts them to be carrying the Wen name, which is now tarnished with such barbaric deeds. The feeling has grown even more repulsive now, and it's impossible for them to shake it off.

Mianmian, her eyes filled with dismay, dwelled on the crimes that Jin and Guangshan had committed. If those two were currently alive and were to team up, she wondered if what Wei Wuxian had said would come true. Would the already dark future become bleaker if the Lanling Jin Clan followed in the footsteps of the Qishan Wen Clan?

It is highly likely, with a probability of 99%, that the Jins would follow the Wen Clan’s footsteps. Somehow, she can understand Wen Qing's current emotional state.

Watching the massacre from below the main ground of Lotus Pier, Yu Ziyuan’s gaze turned dark, saying, “Those Wen dogs. How dare you mess with my clan?!”

She then marched down the main ground while surrounded by a swirling purple lightning that crackled and hissed as if it’s responding to its master’s anger. Upon descending at the battleground, she stepped through the raging flames, her eyes emanating a ferocious intensity infused unwavering power.

Behind her, two distinct silhouettes emerged from the raging flames, and it was Jiang Wanyin and an injured Wei Wuxian.

Despite the hope that began rising in the chests of the cultivators, the Jiangs were still outnumbered. The odds of securing a victory were abysmal, even if Yu Ziyuan, Jiang Wanyin, and Wei Wuxian were to fight together. Furthermore, the injury sustained by the head disciple, Wei Wuxian, compounded their misfortune.

“Please be okay,” Jiang Yanli whispered.

“They will be, Mother,” Jin Ling reassured his mother that despite sharing the same worries with her. “Jiujiu is strong, and Wei Wuxian can still fight.”

Wei Wuxian let out a chuckle that lacked any trace of amusement. "You seem to have immense in me, A-Ling," he remarked.

“This is not the time to talk about faith, Wei Wuxian,” Jin Ling responded, his eyes displaying a fierce determination yet also revealing his underlying anxiety.

His nephew was worried for them.

Wei Wuxian observed his nephew's evident anxiety, and he couldn't help but feel touched by his concern. With a gentle smile and an affirmative nod, he said, “Right.”

As soon as the Wen disciples caught sight of the three, they swiftly launched themselves in attack mode. However, Zidian was just as quick and efficient, if not more so. With a swift flick of her wrist, she sent them all flying into the air like rag dolls, until they slammed against the hard ground.

The cultivators erupted in a boisterous exclamation of affirmation, their voices tinged with an unmistakable note of excitement.

“Yes!!”

“Destroy them all!!”

As soon as the following wave of Wen disciples emerged, Wei Wuxian and Jiang Wanyin reacted quickly and decisively. They sprang into action, unsheathing their swords with a swift motion. Their sharp blades sliced through the relentless horde of Wen disciples with such precision and control that the disciples couldn't even put up a fight. With their impeccable swordsmanship, Wei Wuxian and Jiang Wanyin seemed to be untouchable, as they skilfully cut down their foes without breaking a sweat.

Being recognized as one of the best cultivators during their time, it comes as no surprise that they were untouchable, leaving no room for anyone to even attempt to challenge them. These two skilled brothers effortlessly and ruthlessly killed several disciples within a matter of seconds.

The disciples and cultivators gazed in awe and wonderment at the incredible display before them. It was an immense pleasure to witness the two brothers in action, fighting with great fervor while showcasing their exceptional teamwork. It became clear that this was where the brothers' true battle experience began, as their incredible aptitude and skill was on full display.

“So cool,” Jingyi said, his eyes gleaming with awe.

Zizhen nodded, “I know.”

Mae, despite her silence, felt a rush of pride in her chest. She observed her son skillfully cutting down and moving through the vast group of Wens, which is not only impressive but also remarkable.

Although Yu Ziyuan had frequently ventured out from Lotus Pier on night-hunting missions before, the current scenario made it seem as though she, her son, and Wei Wuxian had been working together numerous years.

With careful precision, Yu Ziyuan eliminated each Wen disciple with the agility and deadly effectiveness of a venomous serpent. In contrast, Jiang Wanyin fought with

ferocity akin to that of a violent wave, crashing down upon his enemies with reckless abandon. Meanwhile, Wei Wuxian was as quiet and quick as an owl, flitting through the night as he traversed the battlefield. His movements were purposeful and deliberate, allowing him to kill his enemies with ease. With his attire that blended seamlessly with the darkness, he was nearly invisible to the unsuspecting eye, adding to his overall stealth.

But, at the moment, in contrast to how he's being described, Wei Wuxian is slow.

Lan Wangji couldn't help but become increasingly concerned. With each sudden movement or quick dodge, pained flashed across his husband's face. Not only that, but his husband was also struggling to breathe. Lan Wangji felt utterly helpless watching his partner suffer this way. Even though he wished to help him, his own injury and the previous attack on their clan made him aware that he wasn't strong enough to provide aid to his loved ones.

“No shit,” Wei Wuxian muttered, and Cangse Sanren and Lan Wangji glared at him. “What? Indeed I was becoming slow.”

Cangse Sanren rolled her eyes at her son and responded, “That’s only because *‘someone’* thought it was a good idea to—”

“A-Se,” Wei Changze spoke when he spotted Yu Ziyuan's glare.

Cangse Sanren, despite feeling annoyed, stayed close to her son and scoffed.

“Aiyah, Lan Zhan, I’m going to be fine,” Wei Wuxian reassured. “Being slow doesn’t mean I can’t fight anymore.”

“Someone could hurt you,” Lan Wangji replied with a profound scowl. “I trust you, but I cannot trust the people around you.”

“Well, there’s Jiang Cheng to protect me.”

Lan Wangji's gaze turned intense as he recalled some memories, and he responded with an audible hum that conveyed his wariness. Jiang Wanyin, sensing his glare, refrained from commenting, knowing only too well the unspoken message behind that hum.

After cutting the Wens down, the resulting pain made Wei Wuxian grind his teeth and collapse onto his knees. His wounds, inflicted by Zidian, ached intensely. His imprudent haste had caused injuries that were piercing deeper into his muscles and even his bones. Attempting to calm himself, he took a quivering breath and endeavored to push through the sensations. He stood up and held his sword, determined to keep fighting.

That is until Wen Zhuliu suddenly appeared.

And he's targeting Jiang Wanyin.

"No!!" Jiang Fengmian and Jiang Yanli exclaimed.

Wei Wuxian acted without a second thought, "Jiang Cheng, look out!"

He shoved his brother out of the way.

Cangse Sanren, Wei Changze, and Lan Wangji's heart stilled, their expression turned into horror.

"Wei Ying, no!!"

"A-Xian!!"

Thanks to this fortunate circumstance, Wen Zhuliu's hand was able to land on his shoulder instead of the chest, effectively preventing the destruction of the core.

Cangse Sanren and Wei Changze stood there, their faces twisted into expressions of intense worry, their hands clenched tightly into fists. They had just come dangerously close to seeing their beloved son's core being completely obliterated before their very eyes. They breathed a heavy sigh of relief. Thank God it did not happen.

Cangse Sanren's face was then filled with anger and disappointment as she couldn't believe her son was sacrificing himself once again. She turned to him and uttered, "Why do you always have to put yourself in harm's way?! Haven't you learned to protect yourself?!"

“What are you implying?” Yu Ziyuan scowled. “That Wei Wuxian shouldn’t have stepped in and let Wen Zhuliu destroy A-Cheng’s core?”

“San-niang,” Jiang Fengmian warned.

Yu Ziyuan turned to her husband, “What? Did you not hear what she just said?!”

“I think Cangse-qianbei's concern was not about Wei-xiong's bravery or selflessness, but rather about prioritizing his own life. By always putting himself in harm's way to help others, Wei-xiong could be risking his own safety,” Nie Huaisang interjected with half of his face covered with a fan. “She does have the right to feel angry and protective of her son. I mean, Wei-xiong can always save others, but I would not want him to be in danger at all costs.”

As Yu Ziyuan shot daggers at him with her eyes, Nie Huaisang stood his ground, refusing to concede. Instead, he steadfastly continued, providing more context about the situation, “Being caught off guard doesn't mean they are completely defenseless. In fact, an individual with the right skills and instincts can still dodge an unexpected attack within a few seconds. Of course, this all depends on their level of expertise. In the case of Jiang-xiong and Wen Zhuliu, I carefully calculated the distance between them earlier and concluded that Jiang-xiong could have avoided Wen Zhuliu's attack with some quick reflexes. However, I believe that Wei-xiong acted impulsively and without considering the consequences as he prioritizes the well-being of his brother over his own.”

‘Right,’ Lan Xichen thought for a moment as he glanced at the two brothers. *‘Yu-furen instilled a responsibility in Wei Wuxian’s mind; to protect Jiang Wanyin, and he did so,*

without hesitation, not only because of love, but because it was also an obligation that he needs to do. Cangse-qianbei does have the right to be angry, but Yu-furen is so wrong to imply that Wei Wuxian would not protect Jiang Wanyin. Wei Wuxian could've lost his core earlier and she's still thinking about her son's well-being.'

Wei Wuxian was in a state of confusion after Nie Huaisang stood up for him, again, however, he couldn't help but feel a sense of relief as his mother's temper began to subside. Despite Wei Wuxian's calming thoughts, Yu Ziyuan's fury showed no signs of diminishing and she was prepared to react, but her fury was interrupted by Nie Mingjue, who positioned himself between the two with a fierce glare.

"Further comments can be discussed later," he said.

Being shoved forward and his back getting hit again, Wei Wuxian gasped in pain.

Yu Ziyuan's voice echoed in the space, as she exclaimed "Wei Ying!" which only served as warning to Wei Wuxian, urging him to dodge as Zidian made contact onto Wen Zhuliu's wrist. Wen Zhuliu's swift reflexes came into play as he managed to successfully grip onto Zidian. The latent power within Wen Zhuliu surged forth, resulting in a shockwave that created a cloud of dust that permeated the surroundings.

When the dust settled, Yu Ziyuan and Wen Zhuliu emerged from the cloud of debris, engaged in a fierce battle. The air was thick with tension as they locked eyes, each determined to prove their strength and superiority. Their movements were swift and deadly, a testament to their immense power and skill as cultivators. The battle raged on with neither combatant willing to back down or show any sign of weakness. It was a fight to the death, a true test of their mettle and determination.

However, it was clear from the events that unfolded in the main hall that Yu Ziyuan was not up to the task of dealing with someone as skilled as Wen Zhuliu. Nevertheless, despite being aware of this fact, she exhibited an admirable willingness to confront and fight against an opponent of his caliber.

The cultivators gazed in amazement, and they couldn't help but feel awestruck by the incredible display of power before them. Yu Ziyuan, though clearly outmatched by Wen Zhuliu's impressive ability and skills, was holding her own. It was a testament to the sheer

strength and prowess of the fearsome violet spider, leaving the cultivators mesmerized by the awe-inspiring sight.

"She's so cool," a Jiang disciple said quietly. Their current sect leader may be strong and powerful, but no one can deny that his mother is equally so.

“You’re right,” a Jin disciple responded. “No wonder her title still frightens many cultivators today; damn, I can't even imagine fighting someone like her.”

"Based from what I’ve seen so far, you'd be dead meat before she could lay a hand on you," A-Qing remarked at the Jin disciple. "But, yeah, she's an amazing fighter."

Xiao Xingchen and Song Lan could only nod their heads slowly in agreement, their eyes fixed on the scene unfolding before them. Both of them had heard countless stories about the tragic downfall of Lotus Pier, but to witness it themselves was an entirely different experience.

“If the Violet Spider is still strong, I wonder how strong Cangse-qianbei is,” Xiao Xingchen stated.

“Being well-known among Baoshan Sanren's disciples for her outstanding cultivation even after she left, I think there's a chance Cangse Sanren will win,” Song Lan responded.

“However, I still applaud the Violet Spider for holding out this long. Wen Zhuliu is a tough opponent after all,” Xiao Xingchen stated, turning to Cangse Sanren before returning his gaze to the screen. “If both fight, I think it might be a draw, but who knows?”

While Yu Ziyuan skillfully diverted Wen Zhuliu's attention, Wei Wuxian and Jiang Wanyin worked together seamlessly in a strategic effort to take down the Wen army.

While the teamwork made the cultivators happy, Jiang Fengmian, on the other hand, was growing agitated and uneasy. When was he going to arrive there? How long did they fight the

Wens and Wen Zhuliu? If he does not arrive imminently and Wen Zhuliu manages to find an opening, the safety of his beloved wife and children would undoubtedly be compromised.

'Hurry,' Jiang Fengmian said to his past self. *'They need you.'*

Then, Yu Ziyuan made Zidian latch onto a pillar and threw it towards Wen Zhuliu, but the latter immediately dodged. Seizing the opportunity, Yu Ziyuan acted quickly. Nevertheless, Wen Zhuliu demonstrated quick thinking by grabbing a nearby Wen corpse and using it as protection from Zidian's attack.

As Zidian struck the corpse, its blood sprayed into the air and some landed in Yu Ziyuan's eyes, temporarily blinding her.

"A-Niang!!" Jiang Wanyin shouted.

"Shit!" an unknown cultivator shouted.

"No! Don't give Wen Zhuliu the opportunity to attack you!!"

As if hearing the unknown cultivator, Wen Zhuliu attacked the vulnerable Yu Ziyuan. In an instant, Zidian transformed back into its ring form. However, despite being blinded temporarily, Yu Ziyuan managed to dodge Wen Zhuliu's attack with remarkable agility and countered with a powerful punch. Not wasting a moment, she immediately rushed towards the direction of Wei Wuxian and her son, grabbing both their collars.

"Let's go!" she shouted before jumping over the wall.

The cultivators had all thought in unison, *'Yes! Run away!'* This was not because they thought Yu Ziyuan was a coward (because she isn't in the first place), but rather because they knew that running away was their only chance at survival. Knowing Wen Zhuliu, he would not pursue them without Wen Chao's orders.

“But Yu-furen running away also means…” Mianmian came to a halt in the middle of her sentence, and Jin Zixuan and Madam Jin, who heard her, tightened their fists.

Yu Ziyuan will save the kids and sacrifice herself.

Madam Jin turned her gaze towards her sworn sister who appeared unperturbed by the pressing situation at hand. However, she was well aware that beneath the facade of calmness lay a woman ridden with feelings of frustration and sadness. While her sworn sister made sure the kids were out of trouble, Yu Ziyuan had no such support whilst battling the remaining forces of the Wens. Jiang Fengmian arrived only in the nick of time, but he succumbed to the horrors of the battle as well.

She wondered what it would truly feel like to be in her own shoes at that very moment. The mere thought of leaving her precious son's side and her behind at the mercy of her bastard of a husband caused an instantaneous ache in her heart.

“A-Niang,” Jiang Yanli whispered in distress and turned to her mother. “A-Niang.”

Yu Ziyuan frowned, “What is it, A-Li?”

Despite the fierceness in her tone, Jiang Yanli came to a sudden realization that she could not bear to be without her mother's comforting presence. The mere thought of her mother's death felt unbearable. However, recalling the events from the past, she was struck with an overwhelming sense of grief, causing tears to pool in the corners of her eyes.

Yu Ziyuan noticed this and sighed, “Why are you crying, A-Li?”

“I-I…” she stuttered. “I don’t want you to die, A-Niang.”

Jiang Wanyin slumped down, his body wilting like a flower that has been left to wither away. He couldn't bear seeing his mother's death again like this.

"Well, I still did," Yu Ziyuan responded nonchalantly. Jiang Yanli felt like shouting at her for being so casual about it. It was as if she did not care about her own death at all. But she held herself back, knowing that doing so would result in nothing.

Jin Ling tightly embraced his mother, his heart crushed at the sight of her crying and in grief. His gaze shifted towards his formidable grandmother, who already had her eyes fixated on him, and he immediately felt a sense of unease. Under her fierce gaze, Jin Ling felt compelled to lower his eyes to the ground, intimidated. However, his apprehension was alleviated when he sensed the tender touch on his head. When he looked up, it was his grandmother's hand. Though fleeting, the gesture provided warmth in his heart. Seriously, he's hungry for even the smallest crumbs of affection from his family.

Going back to the matter, although Yu Ziyuan was a complete stranger to him, Jin Ling couldn't help but feel a sense of grief at the mere thought of losing his beloved grandparents right before his eyes. His heart was fragile, and he is unable to bear the weight of heavy emotions that was bubbling up inside of him. It was a confusing and tumultuous time, and he was at a loss as to what to do with these powerful sentiments.

After successfully escaping, the three safely landed on the other side of the river, and Wei Wuxian was immediately thrown into the boat and let out a gasp as his back made contact with the hard wooden surface of the boat.

"Wei Ying!!"

"Wei Ying!" Yu Ziyuan exclaimed. "You wretched boy!"

Wei Changze's expression immediately darkened and he turned to Yu Ziyuan, "What?"

"Changze, she does not mean that," Jiang Fengmian stepped in to alleviate the escalating tension between the two.

“Your wife’s expression says otherwise,” Wei Changze argued.

Wei Wuxian winced in response to her hurtful words, feeling a twinge of pain. He couldn't bring himself to look her in the eyes and instead cast his gaze downward.

Cangse Sanren and Lan Wangji really wanted to remove that expression from his face. It only made their hearts constrict even more.

"You can speak to the kid without speaking harshly," Song Lan remarked faintly, but Lan Xichen hears him and agrees with him internally.

“You damn little brat! I hate you! I hate you more than anything else!”

Once again, her hurtful words pierced right through Wei Wuxian’s fragile chest. Cangse Sanren and Wei Changze, upon seeing their son's hurt expression, were filled with anger and fury.

Baoshan Sanren shook her head in disappointment and whispered to herself, “It is truly disgraceful of you, Yu Ziyuan, to direct your unfounded hate towards an innocent child in such a manner.”

“See it for yourself, what kind of disaster you brought to Lotus Pier!!”

Jingyi could no longer take it, rage filled his eyes. “It’s not even his fault! If you all analyze the situation with a discerning eye, y’all will realize that the Wens had long been planning to overthrow the clans and solidify their dominance and power in the cultivation world. Their true purpose for visiting Lotus Pier was to announce the building of the offices. However, they cleverly used Senior Wei as a cover-up in order to initiate an attack. Therefore, the Wens should be held accountable for all the chaos and havoc that ensued!”

“Jingyi—”

“Cease your ceaseless accusations! His suffering surpasses the threshold of what any human being could endure! He had shown immense courage and resilience despite all that has been thrust upon him, yet here you are, making him feel like he's nothing more than dust beneath your feet. We have done everything we can to make him feel happy, and this is how you treat him? Hah! May your every morning will be filled with the warmth of your own urine!”

The temple was engulfed in a complete and utter silence after Jingyi’s outburst. His final sentence, although delivered with utmost seriousness, was received by some with a suppressed urge to break into a fit of laughter.

On the side, Cangse Sanren and Wei Changze experienced a mixture of surprise and happiness that the kid defended their son.

In the midst of all this, Wei Wuxian was enveloped in a sense of calm by Jingyi’s unfeigned concern. His little ducklings had oftentimes come to his aid, valiantly standing up against cultivators who continued to besmirch his name. It was a wonder how brave they were and how nobly they spoke for him, and every single time, Wei Wuxian heart was moved. Indeed, tears of gratitude now shimmered in the corner of his eyes, and he did not anyone to see it, so he embraced Lan Wangji more tightly, resting his face on his broad chest.

Yu Ziyuan was left completely speechless and unable to utter a single word following that sudden and intense outburst.

On the side, Lan Qiren nearly qi-deviate after seeing Jinyi passionately yelling at Yu Ziyuan.

"Is he even my disciple?" he asked himself, and Lan Xichen chuckled.

"Shufu, you have to give him credit. He's certainly... one of kind," said Lan Xichen playfully.

Lan Qiren bit back an exasperated sigh. In all honesty, Lan Qiren was inclined to stop Jingyi's outburst. However, despite his initial impulse, he couldn't help but ponder over his words. They struck him deeply and he realized that perhaps everyone present, including himself and Yu Ziyuan, needed to hear his perspective.

Jiang Wanyin, seeing the carnage around them, hesitantly asked his mother, "A-Niang, what should we do now?"

"What do you mean 'what do we do?' Can't you see it? They came here prepared! Soon afterwards there'll be herds of Wen-dogs arriving!"

A multitude of cultivators were seen clenching their fists at the severity of the situation. The overwhelming feeling of helplessness washed over them as they struggled to come to terms with the direness of the situation at hand.

"Today's battle was inevitable," Yu Ziyuan declared, twisting Zidian a few times. Then, in an unexpected move, she removed Zidian completely, leaving everyone shocked at the sudden action.

Madam Lan gasped in disbelief as she realized the reason for Yu Ziyuan's unexpected behaviour, "What? You…"

With a firm hold on her son's hand, Yu Ziyuan put Zidian on his index finger.

With his wife passing on the responsibility of Zidian to their son, he really felt like he's going to lose her sooner than he originally thought.

Jiang Fengmian shook his head, *'No, I will arrive there and I will protect my wife.'*

But despite saying that, deep down he was aware of the impending outcome, and he acknowledged his state of denial. In spite of this, he clung onto the hope of a favorable conclusion.

Eyes widened in disbelief, Jiang Wanyin turned to his mother, “A-Niang, why are you giving Zidian to me?!”

Uncharacteristically, Yu Ziyuan hesitated. Then, carefully, she fixed her son’s collar and replied with great care and consideration, “I’ve given it to you, so it’ll be yours from now on. Zidian has already recognized you as its master.”

Indeed, it is unusual for Yu Ziyuan to behave in such a manner. However, knowing why she’s behaving like this is truly devastating—not only for Yu Ziyuan herself but also for the entire Jiang family.

Meanwhile, hearing the same words that had been tormenting him for years, he gradually lowered his head and shut his eyes tightly, determined not to let his tears stream down his face.

“No,” Jiang Yanli whispered. “A-Niang, don’t!”

“Go now,” Yu Ziyuan ordered.

“You…” Jiang Wanyin hesitated. “Won’t you come with us?”

Raising her hand to pat her son’s head gently, she ordered once again, “Go find your sister in Meishan. Your sister left 2 days ago, so she should still be on the way. Go, and never come back.”

“A-Niang!” he asked again, eyes as wide as an innocent child’s. “Aren’t you coming with us?”

Jin Zixuan turned his gaze towards Jiang Wanyin and he couldn't help but feel sad for him. Losing a mother is an immensely difficult experience to endure, but what made it even worse

for Jiang Wanyin was the brutal manner in which the Violet Spider died, as well as his father, Jiang-zongzhu.

Jin Zixuan is unable to comprehend Jiang Wanyin's pain. However, the mere thought of a world without his mother left a sting in Jin Zixuan’s heart. Even though his father showered him with affection, Jin Zixuan didn't feel a deep connection with him. For him, his father's affectionate gestures weren't equivalent to expressing love as he never verbally expressed his love for his son. Consequently, Jin never saw his father as someone he could confide in and, as a result, never developed a close relationship with him.

"It's okay to cry, you know," Jin Zixuan said quietly to the man next him. "Crying does not mean you are weak."

"Says the one who refuses to cry as well," Jiang Wanyin responded, though with less venom.

Jin Zixuan let out a sigh, "Well, that was me in the past, and I've come to realize a lot of things while growing up and loving A-Li."

Jiang Wanyin scoffed, "I should applaud A-Jie for turning you into less of a peacock."

"Pea—fine, you can still call me that; a lot of people do anyway."

Jiang Wanyin thanked him for distracting him a little..

Then, Jiang Wanyin was pulled into her embrace.

Yu Ziyuan's temper may be fierce, but beneath her tough exterior still lies a strong mother who expresses her affection for her son in her own unique manner. The strength of a mother's love is truly unparalleled, and many mothers within the temple can empathize with Yu Ziyuan's love for her child.

Yu Ziyuan held onto her son with overwhelming tightness. It was as if she was determined to protect him from any possible danger that the world might throw their way, or from anyone who might try to harm him.

Jiang Wanyin had never experienced such an embrace from his mother before; it was something completely new to him. Her affectionate kisses on his hair only added to the tenderness of the moment, leaving him both surprised and deeply confused by her sudden display of love and care. He did not know what to do or how to react.

Yu Ziyuan's demeanor began to show a hint of emotional softening as she reminisced about a past moment. It was a singular moment of affection when she had kissed her son, and in hindsight, she realized that there might have been more opportunities for such tenderness. However, her strong sense of pride and quick temper made it difficult for her to let down her guard and reveal vulnerability.

Witnessing her own children in a state of anguish, with tears threatening to spill down their faces, evoked an unmistakable wave of sorrow within her as well.

“Good boy,” she whispered as a silver tear fell down her own face.

All of the cultivator’s eyes softened, their grief was palpable. The sight of Yu Ziyuan, the fierce Violet Spider, shedding tears in front of them was both heart-breaking and surprising. Despite the inevitability of this separation, it was clear that Yu Ziyuan was struggling to say goodbye to her son forever. It was a sentiment shared by all present, as they watched the scene with heavy hearts. In this dangerous time, the parents will have to sacrifice themselves to keep their children safe and for them to survive.

Despite the distraction from Jin Zixuan, Jiang Wanyin could not help but feel an overwhelming wave of emotions as he witnessed his mother's tears. Overcome with grief, he sank to his knees and covered his face from the other cultivators. Jiang Yanli, too, was unable to hold back her tears any longer, and openly wept alongside Jin Ling and Jin Zixuan's comforting presence at her side.

Upon seeing his wife like this, Jiang Fengmian’s heart shatter into a million pieces. Without hesitation, he reached for her hand, Yu Ziyuan recoiled at his touch. The mere thought of

being comforted by him seemed unbearable. However, Jiang Fengmian's unwavering persistence kept him holding onto her hand, refusing to let go even as she tried to pull away.

“Just let me hold your hand, San-niang.”

Yu Ziyuan scoffed and grumbled a few curse words, but did not pull away.

Yu Ziyuan took the sword from her son’s grasp and pulled away from the hug. Then, she shoved Jiang Wanyin towards the boat as well. Wei Wuxian caught him, but Jiang Wanyin’s mind was entirely focused on his mother as he exclaimed, “A-Niang, what are you doing?!”

Instantly, a brilliant flash of purple lightning appeared, coiling tightly around both Jiang Wanyin and Wei Wuxian with a powerful force, leaving them helpless to break free and continue their pursuit.

“Once you get to a safe place, Zidian will release you,” Yu Ziyuan explained, then she turned to Wei Wuxian, commanding, “Wei Ying, listen to me clearly. Protect Jiang Cheng well! Protect him with your life! Do you understand?!”

“Madam Yu—”

“Did you hear me?!” Yu Ziyuan exclaimed. “Don’t tell me any nonsense! I’m asking you—did you hear me?!”

Lan Xichen had reached a pivotal realization that this was perhaps the very moment where it all began. This was the moment when Wei Wuxian first recognized the paramount importance of his duty to protect Jiang Wanyin. Yu Ziyuan really had instilled in Wei Wuxian a sense of obligation, and as Wei Wuxian felt responsible for the destruction of Lotus Pier, he deemed it necessary to atone for his actions. As Lan Xichen carefully observed the memories, it became evident to him that Wei Wuxian had always acted in accordance with his moral compass, and everything he had done was justified. Consequently, the only way Wei Wuxian believed he could make amends for his past mistakes was by being a stalwart protector of Jiang Wanyin.

'She could've said something else,' Lan Xichen thought to herself. *‘See what those words did to Wei Wuxian.’*

Perhaps Lan Xichen was not the only one who had taken note of Yu Ziyuan's behaviour as there were several cultivators present who visibly expressed their disgust towards her actions.

'He was exactly like me,' Wen Ning lamented. *‘But because of her, Wei-gongzi became broken. He protected people, but at this moment, who can protect him?’*

Wei Wuxian lowered his head and responded, “Yes.”

“A-Niang!” Jiang Wanyin exclaimed in distress. “A-Die hasn't returned yet; can’t we get through anything together first?!”

With the mention of her husband’s name, for a split second, Yu Ziyuan’s eyes seemed to turn red as she countered, “So what if he hasn’t come back? Can’t I do anything without him?!”

Her harsh words seemed to cut through Jiang Fengmian’s heart as he whispered, “San-niang, don’t say that. I will always come back.”

Yu Ziyuan remained silent, unable to say anything back.

Yu Ziyuan, her figure draped in magnificent purple robes, swiveled gracefully on her heel. Her robes billowed and danced in the wind as she took a confident stride towards the burning pier. Despite the chaos that surrounded her, her stride remained determined and poised.

The boat slowly started drifting away into the vastness of the water, and Jiang Wanyin could feel his heart racing in fear and desperation. With all the strength he could

muster, he cried out at the top of his lungs…

“A-Niang!” he shouted, unable to get any closer. “A-Niang!”

Jiang Wanyin's agonized cries shattered the hearts of multiple onlookers, prompting them to avert their gazes.

As Jin Ling watched the scene unfold before him, it stirred up memories of his own childhood. He vividly remembered the intense feeling of desperation he felt whenever he cried out for his parents. He also recalled how his uncle, although usually grumbling a few words or making heatless threats, always came to his side to comfort him. These moments of vulnerability and reassurance stayed deep-rooted in Jin Ling's heart.

At this particular moment, he felt like he’s seeing himself on the screen before him.

“Jiujiu..”

“A-Niang!”

With Jiang Wanyin's voice resonating through the stillness of the night, the world faded to black.

Wei Wuxian was overwhelmed with the pain his family was going through. Every time his loved ones cried, he felt their suffering deep within his heart. He's desperate for the unpleasant events to cease. The mere thought of the forthcoming scene and the potential damage it could do to his family caused him anguish.

‘Jiang Cheng, that scene will be soon,’ Wei Wuxian thought sorrowfully as he glanced towards his brother. *‘Please, I hope you don’t blame yourself after.’*

The boat Wei Wuxian and Jiang Wanyin were on drifted across the water. Jiang Wanyin, kneeling down with his body shaking uncontrollably, was left pondering upon unfortunate event that led them to this situation. He racked his brain trying to make sense of it all.

Lotus Pier burned in the distance. The flickering flames illuminated the night-time sky, casting an eerie orange glow over the horizon. The once thriving city was now reduced to a smoldering heap of ashes and ruins, a devastating sight that left a heavy weight on my heart.

After a brief moment of silence that felt like an eternity, the two brothers suddenly noticed a faint glimmer in the vast expanse of the sky above them.

"A-die!" Jiang Yanli said as hope returned to her heart. Her father finally had come.

“It’s Jiang-zongzhu!!”

Jiang Cheng brightened and stood up, shouting, "A-Die! A-Die!"

When Jiang Fengmian saw the pair, he motioned for his men to proceed without him and descended.

“A-Cheng, A-Xian? What happened?”

“A-Die, let’s go now!”

Yu Ziyuan was tempted to close her eyes. Now, Jiang Fengmian will know the truth.

Hesitantly, Jiang Fengmian reached a hand out, responding, “This is your mother’s Zidian. Zidian knows its masters, I don’t think it would let me-”

The second he touched Zidian, it retracted obediently, turning back into a ring and wrapping around one of Jiang Fengmian's fingers.

He froze.

Jiang Fengmian knew much after that happened. This weapon was of utmost importance to his wife, and recognized multiple masters, although it followed a specific order. Jiang Fengmian's wife was the primary master of Zidian and had given it a command to restrain his son until he was out of harm's way. Despite being a master of Zidian himself, his could not break free from its hold due to his wife's command. Eventually, he was recognized as the secondary master of Zidian, and only when the weapon determined they were safe did it finally release its grip on him.

There was no indication that his wife had ever mentioned allowing Zidian to acknowledge him as its master.

Jiang Fengmian and Jiang Yanli redirected their gazes towards Yu Ziyuan, who avoided making any eye contact and chose to remain silent. Everything that needed to be said, and whatever they were perceiving at the moment was the authentic truth. Thus, there's no need for her to elaborate.

'And you said your marriage was loveless, Ziyuan?' Madam Jin thought bitterly. *'You clearly care for each other, yet both of you seemed to disregard the importance of effective communication.'*

Having been released from Zidian, Jiang Wanyin and Wei Wuxian both collapsed to the sides, panting heavily.

Jiang Fengmian had a hunch of what happened and immediately asked, "What is going on? Why would you two tied onto a boat by Zidian?"

Jiang Wanyin instantly clutched Jiang Fengmian's legs and explained, "Today the Wen Sect's people were at our sect. Mom had an argument with them and started fighting with the Core- Melting Hand! Mom might be at a disadvantage. Later, there might be even more enemies. A-Die, let's go back and help her!"

Hearing this, Jiang FengMian eyes widened, "The Core-Melting Hand?!"

"You need to go!" a female cultivator shouted, her tone tinged with irritation. "He might be still there!"

"Wen Chao and that bitch, too," another cultivator remarked. "Many of your disciples have already died; fly there now and help your wife!"

Hearing the two, Jiang Fengmian indeed wished he was fast enough to get there.

Jiang Wanyin nodded, "Yes, A-Die! We—"

Just as he was about to complete his sentence, a blaze of purple light erupted, causing Jiang Wanyin and Wei Wuxian to be bound yet again.

"Good," Yu Ziyuan muttered. At the very least, her son would be safe and out of harm's way. That's all she needed to see.

Cangse Sanren and Wei Changze were also relieved that Jiang Fengmian did not let their son run away.

In the position that they had been, the two collapsed onto the smaller boat. Jiang Wanyin's eyes widened in disbelief as he asked, "A-Die?!"

"I'll go back, you two leave. Don't turn in any way. Don't return to Lotus Pier," Jiang Fengmian ordered. "After you reach the shore, try to go to Meishan as soon as possible

to find your sister and your grandmother."

Wei Wuxian did not like any of this and shouted, "Uncle Jiang!!!"

"A-Die, let me go! Let me go!"

Despite his willingness to help, Nie Mingjue found himself unable to do so during the sudden attack. It was not until days later that they learned of the tragic fall of Lotus Pier. Even if he had been able to lend a hand, the Wen's would have been at a disadvantage in numbers, despite having Wen Zhuliu on Wen Chao's side. And even the fact that Qinghe-Nie is a considerable distance away, if they were to travel by air to reach Lotus Pier, the journey would last several hours. Moreover, upon their arrival in Yunmeng, they would be confronted with the devastation that has completely overtaken the area.

"I will go back to find San-niang," Jiang Fengmian explained.

Regardless, they had failed; they were going to die.

They were going to die together.

Jiang Wanyin glowered at him, "We can go back and find her together, can't we?!"

Jiang Fengmian stared into his son's eyes. Suddenly, he reached out. Only after pausing in the air did he finally touch his son's head, slowly, "A-Cheng, be well."

Jiang Fengmian felt the strong desire to give his son a reassuring pat on the head, conveying comfort and the message that he's here now. He's not leaving his son's side anytime soon.

Instead, it was Jiang Yanli who went closer to her parents and her brother.

“We’re here,” Jiang Fengmian whispered, and Jiang Yanli and Jiang Wanyin's eyes welled up once again.

“Uncle Jiang, if anything happens to you, he won’t be well,” Wei Wuxian pointed out.

Jiang Fengmian turned his eyes on him.

Yu Ziyuan had mentally braced herself to listen to her husband's affectionate words directed towards Wei Wuxian without having telling their son as well. However, what he uttered next was beyond her expectations and caught her off guard

"A-Ying... you must look after A-Cheng.”

The cultivators were taken aback and thought that they might have misheard Jiang Fengmian's words, even Yu Ziyuan was visibly stunned by her husband’s words. In light of recent events, it was apparent that Jiang Fengmian's conduct had created an impression that he preferred Wei Wuxian over his own son. However, it turns out that this assumption was entirely incorrect.

Jiang Fengmian loves his son too.

“What?”

“He really..”

‘That’s what I’ve telling A-Cheng the whole time,’ Wei Wuxian thought internally.

Wei Wuxian seemed unsurprised by the order.

All along, he had known that Jiang Fengmian loved Jiang Cheng more than he loved him. It was all clear as day.

Jiang Wanyin had been so focused on his mother that he failed to register the words his father had spoken to his brother at that moment.

His father cared… He was loved…

This only made him want to cry more.

Jiang Fengmian then mounted his sword with swift determination towards the burning pier, barely acknowledging his son's anguished pleas.

“A-Die!” and Wei Wuxian’s sorrowful gaze.

The boat drifted more and more away from the pier.

The cultivators yearned for peace and despised the never-ending cycle of bloodshed. However, comprehending the complete picture of the past and understanding reality required intricate analysis of every minute detail. The attack from the Gusu Lan Sect and Yunmeng Jiang Sect was only the inception of a prolonged period of butchery and brutality. The cultivators, particularly those with feeble hearts, will have to mentally prepare themselves.

The disciples of each clan slumped down onto the ground, overwhelmed by the gravity of the situation they had just witnessed. Simply hearing accounts of the destruction of Lotus Pier was an entirely separate experience from being physically present for it. The loss of life, the intense battles, and the heart-wrenching cries of agony and misery were all aspects that could not be fully comprehended solely through the teachings of their instructors or from reading written records.

They were all fortunate that they did not have to go through something like this right now.

“Huh,” a Jiang disciple whispered. “I'm glad I was born in this era.”

A Nie disciple nodded, “Me, too.”

Following the flash-forward, which transported them a considerable distance from the pier, Zidian gradually loosened its grip, enabling the brothers to break free. Eventually, Zidian returned to its ring shape, encircling Jiang Wanyin's finger.

Now that they were free, the boys then embarked on a noiseless journey, using paddles to propel their boat towards Lotus Pier.

“What did I even sacrificed myself for?!” Yu ZIyuan demanded. “Did you even remember what I said?! Was it really so difficult to follow?!”

Jiang Wanyin shrank down under the intense and disapproving gazes of his parents. Despite Jiang Yanli's attempt to provide emotional support by moving closer to her brother, Jin Zixuan could sense her own distress was preventing her from offering any significant relief at this moment.

“I don’t even blame the kid,” Song Lan interjected. “He just lost both of his parents on the same day and at the same time, and he is still processing everything that happened.”

“Although going back there is indeed dangerous,” Xiao Xingchen responded.

The flames engulfed the pier. The heat emanating from it caused the water to shimmer with a range of fiery hues, predominantly orange and red, which starkly contrasted with the tranquil purples that the water would otherwise have displayed.

The Yunmeng Jiang Sect was gone now.

The cultivators were overwhelmed by a deep and sorrowful silence as they beheld the ruins of Lotus Pier, destroyed beyond recognition. Meanwhile, the rest of the Jiangs stood motionless, gazing at the devastation that befell their abode, feeling immense loss and desolation engulfing their souls.

'This was my home, too,' Jin Ling thought. *'I can't imagine immense burden Jiujiu had to bear while restoring Lotus Pier and taking on the responsibility of being the youngest Sect Leader amidst a chaotic war. If I were in his shoes, I wouldn't be able to perform my duties well.'*

Jin Ling continued to observe his uncle, and his level of admiration for him grew even further.

Jiang Wanyin stared at the drifting piece of cloth, all torn and tattered. With a trembling hand, he reached out to grab it, his mind resisting the overwhelming truth. Despite the overwhelming sense of denial that hung in the air, there was no escaping the brutal reality that lay before him. Though he wished more than anything that it wasn't real, the evidence of the Jiang disciple's fate was irrefutable and etched itself painfully into his mind.

The once aesthetically pleasing palette of purple that adorned Lotus Pier had been grotesquely replaced by an ominous and uninviting shade of blackened charcoal. The flag that had once waved proudly in front of the pier was now tilted, and eventually succumbed to the heat, falling unceremoniously to the ground.

With a pronounced air of satisfaction, a Wen disciple strolled past the lifeless bodies of Jiang disciples and confidently planted their foot atop the flag now lying in defeat.

Jiang Fengmian and Yu Ziyuan laid their eyes upon the lifeless bodies of their disciples, and their emotions boiled over with unbridled fury. Their minds were consumed with the singular desire to enter the screen and kill them all.

"Damn Wen-dogs!" Yu Ziyuan exclaimed.

At the Pier, there were an abundance of Wens wandering around each and every corner of the training ground. It was clear that the Wen sect came prepared, as their sheer number of forces was nearly twice that of their opponents. The aftermath was evident in the numerous lifeless bodies scattered across the ground.

It is an undeniable fact that, compared to other clans, the Wen sect is larger and more influential. However, despite the Wen Sect's superiority, it was Meng Yao's treachery and the three great sects (excluding the Lanling-Jin) that were able to bring about the downfall of the Wen Clan, which eventually led to the demise of Wen Ruohan.

“A sect, regardless of its size, could be overpowered if it goes against a coalition of other clans,” Xiao Xingchen explained.

“I agree,” Mianmian interjected. “The smaller sects also played a crucial role in the success of the war.” She then directed her attention towards Lan Xichen and Jiang Wanyin and flashed a smile, acknowledging their contribution in persuading the smaller sects to join the war. These sects held resentment towards the Wen Clan, and hence played a pivotal role in aiding their cause.

Lan Xichen reciprocated the smile, while Jiang Wanyin acknowledged her with a slight nod.

As numerous as they were, the Wen fleet, comprising of a dozen ships, was seen moving in the direction of the Pier with their sun flags held up high, a symbol of their pride and dominance. Upon zooming out, the cultivators could see how Jiang Wanyin was in utter horror as he looked on at the Pier that had been defeated and taken over by the Wen forces.

Without hesitation, Wei Wuxian firmly held his brother and plunged him deep into the water, ensuring that he remained submerged and unable to be seen by the passing ship.

Yu Ziyuan internally nodded as she thought, *‘Good. Keep him safe until the end.’*

After verifying that the boat was far enough, Wei Wuxian allowed his brother to come up.

Jiang Wanyin gazed upon the small, floating sliver of fabric, and despair and hopelessness raged within him. Jiang Wanyin, no, Sect Leader Jiang Wanyin (?), was overcome with emotions that threatened to consume him. Worriedly, Wei Wuxian turned to his brother, understanding the weight of the burden that now rested upon him. Wei Wuxian would do everything in his power to ensure his brother's safety.

And he did protect him, but at what cost?

Jiang Wanyin turned to his brother, and Jiang Yanli could sense the overwhelming sorrow gnawing at his younger brother's heart. Jiang Wanyin knew how much Wei Wuxian had devoted himself to protecting those he cherished, going to great lengths to ensure their safety. The sacrifice Wei Wuxian made was nothing short of remarkable, and Jiang Wanyin was at a loss as to how he could adequately repay him.

In the past, he did made a selfless and courageous decision to sacrifice himself by choosing to be pursued by the Wen-dogs instead of his brother, when he noticed that the Wen-dogs were closing in on him. Despite being aware of the severe repercussions that awaited him if he were to be apprehended by the Wens, he still chose to take this perilous step for the sake of his sibling.

He had to protect Wei Wuxian. He needed to protect his brother at all cost. He did all of that because he loves him.

However, despite making great sacrifices, all of the Jiang Wanyin's efforts came to naught when his own brother made a sacrifice that even the most committed cultivators would not undertake.

Wei Wuxian turned his attention to the burning pier, "Yu-furen is highly skilled, so is Jiang-zongzhu. Now that he's back, everything will be fine. There's a waterway to the training field. We can head there first."

"I told you to leave; why are you both so obstinate?! I let you both get away just so you could live, and now you're going back? Is that your death wish?!" Yu Ziyuan shouted at the two brothers, who were now lowering their heads.

"San-niang," Jiang Fengmian said, "looking at them right now, I know nothing happened to them that day."

“That doesn’t reassure me at all!” Yu Ziyuan countered.

“U-Umm,” Wen Ning timidly spoke, drawing the attention of some cultivators. “Me and sister helped Wei-gongzi and Jiang-gongzi. P-Please don’t worry.”

Yu Ziyuan let her gaze wander over Wen Ning before continuing, “A corpse is talking?”

Wen Qing, Wei Wuxian, and Sizhui’s expressions hardened.

“A-Niang, please stop.” Jiang Wanyin said, causing Yu Ziyuan to scoff in annoyance.

Amidst of the darkness, Wei Wuxian gently guided his brother, tugging him all the way to the pier. At the training field, corpse after corpse was dragged along. The Wens were moving the Jiang disciples’ bodies in lines for easier disposal.

“They’re so sick,” A-Qing said as she hid behind Song Lan.

"You're right, A-Qing," Song Lan responded. "They truly are sick."

Fourth shidi was being dragged into the closest pile, and on the ground was a Yunmeng Jiang bell covered in blood.

“S-Shidi,” Wei Wuxian murmured as thousands of memories flashed in his mind.

Then, a pair of boots appeared, and that person spoke, “One….One moment please.”

“Wait,” Sizhui paused. “That voice…”

“Wen Ning!” Zizhen brightened.

As the Wen disciple who had been dragging the fourth shidi turned around, Wen Ning came into his view. Without wasting any time, Wen Ning swiftly picked up the bell lying on the ground and secured it to the fourth disciple's belt before he got up from the ground.

“Weirdo,” the Wen disciple said as he tossed the fourth shidi into the pile.

“He’s not a weirdo!” Jingyi exclaimed. “You all are the weirdos!!”

“Ah, L-Lan-gongzi,” Wen Ning intervened timidly, only to be met with Jingyi's glare.

“It’s true! Don’t even try to correct me!”

Then, Wen Ning's attention was caught by the movement of a tree branch in the murky waters, prompting him to take a closer look. As he squinted his eyes a bit, his eyes widened upon spotting someone familiar. He quickly glanced at the disciples beside him, but they seemed unaware of anything out of the ordinary. Turning his gaze back to the water, Wen Ning’s suspicions grew stronger. He then told one of the disciples, “I saw a suspicious figure over there. Everyone should follow me! ”

“Yes!”

And without hesitation, they swiftly turned and sprinted in the opposite direction.

Most of the cultivators were shocked. While it was not entirely unexpected that Wen Ning would make an attempt to protect the brothers, the fact that he went to such lengths to deceive the other Wen disciples in the process was an enormous gamble—one that could potentially result in his untimely demise.

'Huh, it's fascinating how even the most timid individuals can exhibit courage at times,' Nie Mingjue thought, taking a glance at Wen Ning.

In the midst of the situation, Yu Ziyuan found herself in a state of confusion and uncertainty. Moments ago, she mocked him for being a corpse, but now she feels a bit remorseful and regretful for her past behavior. Witnessing Wen Ning's brave act of safeguarding her son's life eased her heart.

Wei Wuxian and Jiang Wanyin emerged from the waters and quietly hid behind a wall near them. When the latter took a peak, he instantly faltered. There were piles and piles of dead Yunmeng Jiang disciples in the field, and rivers of blood flowed down them.

The cultivators felt the sudden onset of intense nausea, and they were forced to look away. Both Madam Jin and Jin Zixuan tightly clenched their fists in apparent anger, likely due to the unpleasant memories that the current situation was evoking. The memory of Jin Guangshan undertaking a similar action against the Wens in the past caused revulsion to churn deep within them, making them feel disgusted to their very core at the mere thought of it.

On the other hand, both of the Jiang siblings, as well as Yu Ziyuan and Jiang Fengmian, were utterly incapable of averting their gaze, even if they had been inclined to do so. This was owing to the fact that this memory, which was entirely reminiscent of their deepest and most terrifying nightmares, was presented before them.

Wei Wuxian and Jiang Wanyin were completely taken aback and filled with horror, their eyes widened in shock and disbelief, at the grim sight in front of them. It was as though their hearts had stopped beating as they couldn't comprehend the unimaginable tragedy that had befallen their martial siblings, whose lifeless bodies lay in a heap on the ground.

"A-Niang," Jiang Cheng whispered, glancing around. "A-Die."

Upon recognizing the faces of Wen Chao and Wang Lingjiao, Jiang Wanyin was filled with a sense of regret. He wished he did not see them. Wen Chao was consoling Wang Lingjiao, who seemed to be quite upset, with words that lacked sincerity and substance.

“Don’t cry sweetie, tears are staining your pretty face.”

“You two are disgusting as fuck,” Mianmian blurted out causing Lan Qiren’s brows to twitch.

Despite the bleakness of the situation, Mianmian's sentiments resonated with Lan Qiren. It was difficult to fathom the extent of the inhumanity on display—those two to be standing amidst lifeless bodies, and Wen Chao attempting to provide comfort to the other.

How in the world did they die—Lan Qiren doesn't want to know.

“You wouldn’t like me anymore if my face is stained?”

“How could I?” Wen Chao responded with a smirk. “I will always like you no matter what.”

Behind the wall, Wei Wuxian and Jiang Wanyin were gritting their teeth tightly enough in anger.

Yu Ziyuan and Madam Jin wished they could pull out the intestines of those two and force them to eat them—that would definitely satisfy her heart and mind.

Eyes glistening with emotion, Wang Lingjiao continued, “Wen-er-gongzi, you’ll never imagine how brutal that bitch was~”

Jiang Wanyin leapt forward, only to be pulled back by Wei Wuxian.

Yu Ziyuan did not want to admit nor say this personally, but she internally praised*, 'Very good, Wei Wuxian,'*

On the side, Madam Lan and Qingheng-Jun was frowning. It was evident in Yu Ziyuan's countenance that she was commending Wei Wuxian for protecting her son, which caused them to feel even more disgusted. Given that all she had ever done was mistreat him, then why is she is praising him now? She hurled hurtful words at him; however, now she was exalting him as though she had not acted inappropriately.

It is a natural impulse to protect those we care about, a fact that is universally understood. As such, reminding Wei Wuxian of his place and duties was not necessary, as he was already acutely aware of them from the outset. Regardless of whether he was responsible for the minor issues that arose within the sect or not, Wei Wuxian still allowed himself to be punished.

'Wei Wuxian's unwavering loyalty to the Jiangs, they did not deserved a bit of it,' Madam Lan and Qingheng-jun thought at the same time.

Wang Lingjiao then continued, "I almost couldn't live to see you anymore~"

Wen Chao embraced her, comforting, "Stop talking, Jiaojiao. It's alright now. It's a good thing Wen Zhuliu protected you."

Wang Lingjiao frowned and responded, "You're still mentioning him? Wen Zhuliu, I hate him. If he hadn't arrived so late today, I wouldn't have had to suffer so much! Even now my face still hurts."

"Didn't you scream for help at him earlier, and now you despise him?" Nie Huaisang hissed. "Just how shameless and ungrateful can you be?"

Xiao Xingchen internally agrees. If it weren't for Wen Zhuliu's interference, Wang Lingjiao would've suffered more serious injuries.

Wen Chao then smirked, “I’m sorry it hurts. Here, let me touch it…. I know you don’t like how slow Wen Zhuliu was, but don’t challenge his limit. His level of cultivation is really high. My father still wants to use him for a few more years.”

“Use him for what?” Nie Mingjue demanded. “To crush the cores of the innocent cultivators and murder them?!”

Whilst a certain amount of empathy stirred within Nie Huaisang at the thought of Wen Zhuliu having to put up with Wen Chao, it was overshadowed by his repugnance towards the man. To forsake one's own ethical principles to satisfy past obligations and allegiance was, in his opinion, a transgression worthy of the ultimate penalty.

Wang Lingjiao wasn’t convinced and argued, “So what… So what if he’s a talent? There are so many renowned cultivators with so many talents under Sect Leader Wen, at least thousands.”

“Your disgusting lover is clearly not one of them,” Jin Ling muttered.

“What could happen if he’s gone?”

“World peace,” Jingyi blurted out. “We need him gone and your clan; then the world will be at peace.”

‘Wang Lingjiao, you shameless woman,’ Cangse Sanren thought. Wang Lingjiao had an eloquent way with words, subtly suggesting to Wen Chao that punishing Wen Zhuliu could be a form of solace for her. However, despite Wen Chao's preferences and desires to ease her worries, Cangse Sanren knew that it was unlikely for Wen Chao to punish his own personal guard. Moreover, Wen Zhuliu holds immense value and significance to the Wen Sect, and any harm befalling him would not be taken lightly by Wen Ruohan. After all, he is considered the sacred weapon of the sect.

‘Where has your sense of pride gone?!’ Cangse Sanren longed to yell but resisted the urge.

“Don’t worry, Jiaojiao. I punished the one who hurt your face.”

Hearing that, Wang Lingjiao smirked and wiped away her fake tears.

“That old witch deserved it,” she said, glancing back.

Triggered, Jiang Wanyin demanded, “What did you say?!”

Jiang Fengmian felt the same. How dare this woman say his wife deserves to die?

The screen then came into focus, and the previously blurred surroundings from the memory were revealed in stunning clarity and detail.

Yu Ziyuan’s body knelt before them, kept upright only by her grip on her sword.

“A-Niang!” Jiang Yanli shouted, her voice breaking into a million pieces.

Jin Ling and Jiang Fengmian froze, all of their blood drained from their faces.

Laughing once, Wang Lingjiao continued, “She forced the man to marry her using her family’s influence. As a result, she ended up a deserted wife for over ten years.”

Yu Ziyuan’s headdress that was on the ground and covered with blood, Wang Lingjiao stepped on it like a hopeless bug.

Yu Ziyuan and Jiang Wanyin sees red, but refused to act recklessly now.

“People were mocking her behind her back, but she never learned to restrain herself.”

Wang Lingjiao then approached Yu Ziyuan’s body. Grinning maliciously, she grabbed Yu Ziyuan’s hair and forced her head up.

“That bitch,” Jiang Wanyin snarled, his clenched fists almost turning white. *‘How dare you touch A-Niang like that?!’*

“Ever so arrogant and imperious,” Wang Lingjiao continued mocking. “Her ending is a retribution, hah!”

“I can’t wait for the retribution you’ll receive later, too,” Jin Zixuan muttered.

“Bitch! Didn’t you want to step on my hand and break it?” Wang Lingjiao asked, smirking widely. “Then do it!”

With a sudden burst of fury, she grabbed hold of Yu Ziyuan and forcefully flung her against the wall. In an instant, the Jiang matriarch's lifeless body fell limply onto the frigid ground.

Yu Ziyuan is feeling incredulous at the fact that she is being mocked in such a manner—to a whore no less. No woman should ever lay a hand on her or behave with such disrespect. However, the memories proved her wrong. Despite her immense pride, seeing her lifeless form being treated with such dishonor is a truly a humiliating experience for her, to say the least.

After that, Yu Ziyuan briefly looked at Cangse Sanren, carefully watching for any indication of how she was responding to the situation in front of them. Cangse Sanren was void of both laughter and pity for her. It was unclear to her what Cangse Sanren's thoughts or emotions were in that moment, but nonetheless, Yu Ziyuan felt a sense of relief that Cangse Sanren didn't display any emotions that could have potentially upset her further.

Still, despite her desire to keep her weakness hidden from the crowd and her failure to defend both herself and the sect, she found herself at a loss for what to do. Channeling her frustration towards the immortal seemed out of the question, so the alternative was to remain silent and endure the circumstances.

Wang Lingjiao raised her hand to slap Madam Yu, but Wen Zhuliu intervened and stopped her.

“Violet Spider is a remarkable cultivator,” Wen Zhuliu reminded. “You can hurt her, but do not insult.”

It is an undeniable fact that Wen Zhuliu knows how to respect strong cultivators, and this attribute of his somehow earns him a great deal of respect from others, including Lan Qiren.

‘However, if you feel any respect for Yu Ziyuan, then why follow Wen Ruohan’s orders?’ Lan Qiren internally demanded. *‘Your loyalty would be better placed in a sect that was more deserving, rather than with the Wen Clan.’*

Lan Qiren quickly casts a glance towards his brother, Nie Mingjue, and Wei Changze, and he speculates that their thoughts are in perfect alignment with his own.

Listening to Wen Zhuliu reprimand Wang Lingjiao, Wen Chao scoffed and said, “I gotta say, Violet Spider does have quite some charm. Why didn’t Jiang Fengmian like her?”

‘Cangse Sanren,’ Yu Ziyuan responded in her mind and glanced at Jiang Fengmian, who is now looking a bit tense.

Yu Ziyuan is not entirely surprised that Jiang Fengmian did not have any affection towards her or love her. While Cangse Sanren's presence is one of the reasons for his feelings, there are other reasons as well that are at play which she is also aware of.

Still, that did not mean it did not hurt her.

In an attempt to conceal the pain she was feeling, she let out a scoffing sound and redirected her focus towards the screen in front of her.

“It’s quite obvious if you think about it. Yu Ziyuan is so aggressive,” Wang Lingjiao responded. “She’s clearly a woman yet she brandishes her whip and slaps others all the time. She has no manners at all. Jiang Fengmian has been burdened so much even after he married her. He’s the most unlucky man ever.”

Jiang Fengmian frowned, “That’s not true—”

“She’s right, though,” Yu Ziyuan interjected, drawing Jiang Fengmian's gaze to her.

“No—”

“Jiang Fengmian, what is your excuse now?!” Yu Ziyuan demanded, her eyes brimming with frustration. “Just what do you want to say now?!”

Jiang Fengmian sighed, “I thought I already explained it to you earlier, but it seems that you still refuse to accept it.”

“You—”

Instantly, Wei Wuxian’s expression turned into horror.

“Uncle Jiang.”

Jiang Fengmian immediately shifted his focus towards the screen, and his mouth to drop in astonishment. In that moment, he realized exactly what Wei Wuxian must have discovered.

Jiang Fengmian knelt across Yu Ziyuan's body, a sword pierced through his chest.

Jiang Yanli drew in a sharp breath, letting out an audible gasp.

"A-Die," she whispered in despair and turned to her father to see if he was still near her, and it was then that she noticed his sad yet reassuring smile, and her distressed heart began to calm down instantly.

Wen Chao laughed and continued, "Jiang Fengmian is so pathetic. So what if he's the leader of the clan? He couldn't be with the one he loved; he couldn't even protect his clan. In the end, his golden core was melted away, and his heart was impaled by a nobody."

Jiang Fengmian's fists curled up tightly as he was left with no choice but to acknowledge the truth behind Wen Chao's words.

He truly did not possess the qualities of a true sect leader.

Suddenly, another voice barged in, "Wen-er-gongzi! All of the houses have been searched already. Over two thousand four hundred treasures have been counted. They're being categorized at the moment!"

'Those belong to Lotus Pier!'* Wei Wuxian screamed mentally. *'Those belong to the Jiang Sect!'

"You have no right to use those!" Jin Ling shouted.

The Jiangs, Nies, Lans, and Jin Zixuan nodded furiously.

Wen Chao's expression turned into glee as he laughed, "Well done! Well Done! At such a time, we should have a celebration. Tonight, why don't we set up a banquet here? Make the best use of everything!"

"Around the bodies of dead Jiang disciples?!" Madam Jin exclaimed, disturbed by how gleeful Wen Chao looked at the prospect. "How dare you!"

"I hope for those bodies to curse you all with eternal nightmares," A-Qing muttered.

Wang Lingjiao then spoke in a tender voice, "Wen-er-gongzi, congratulations for conquering Lotus Pier."

Wen Chao raised a brow, "What Lotus Pier? Change the name. Bring down any door carved with the nine-petal lotus crest and replace them with those with the Qishan Wen Sect's sun crest!"

"Fuck you!"

"How dare you?!"

Jiang Wanyin and Yu Ziyuan exclaimed in anger simultaneously.

Still laughing, Wen Chao concluded, "The Yunmeng Jiang Sect is finished."

With a purposeful stride, the Wen Chao advanced towards Jian Fengmian's body. He reached out to the handle of the sword and pulled out the embedded sword in his chest. After that, a hairpin that had been kept hidden in his robes slipped out and landed softly on the ground between them.

It was the hairpin he had fixed for Madam Yu.

Yu Ziyuan stared at the hairpin on the ground, and she was suddenly aware of the presence of the hairpin hidden in her robes.

Laughing, Wen Chao turned around and sauntered away. Then, a sudden gust of wind caused a Jiang flag to detach from its pole and gracefully drift down, eventually landing on Jiang Fengmian's shoulder.

Jiang Wanyin's eyes were wide in horror and despair as he helplessly watched everything unfold before him.

Seeing the horror and realization on her brother's face broke Jiang Yanli. It caused her heart to ache as she tried to put herself in her brother's position, imagining the unimaginable. The thought of being there at such a traumatic event was simply too much for her to bear.

'Please,' Jiang Yanli begged internally. *'Please let them get away without them getting hurt. Please!'*

Wei Wuxian quickly stole a glimpse towards his brother, but he wasn't listening to them anymore. Instead, his attention was completely focused on his parents' bodies. Not taking his eyes off them, Jiang Wanyin slowly began sinking to his knees.

The consequence of witnessing the widespread destruction and loss of innocent lives, an overwhelming sense of hopelessness and desolation was beginning to engulf Jiang Wanyin from within.

Right as he got to the ground, Jiang Wanyin's hand accidentally snapped off a piece of burnt wood.

Wen Zhuliu immediately glanced over.

“No!”

“A-Cheng!”

Just then, Wen Ning, who was coincidentally in the way flinched under Wen Zhuliu’s gaze and said, “S-Sorry.”

After a moment of thought, the Core Melting Hand turned back around.

Everyone breathed out a sigh of relief.

“That was close,” Madam Lan whispered.

Wei Wuxian stood silently behind the wall, his ears perked for any sound of detection. His hand was firmly clasped around Jiang Wanyin's mouth to stifle any attempted outburst. However, despite Wei Wuxian's efforts, Jiang Wanyin struggled relentlessly to free himself from Wei Wuxian's grasp, causing Wei Wuxian to strain to maintain his hold.

“A-Cheng!” Jiang Fengmian yelled, his fists clenched tightly in anxiousness.

“Are you really trying to die?!” Yu Ziyuan demanded. “Don’t try to escape!”

While Wang Lingjiao enthusiastically continued his congratulatory message to Wen Chao, Jiang Wanyin was caught up in a fierce battle against Wei Wuxian's unyielding grip. Despite the former's desperate attempts to break free by squirming, pulling, and hitting, the latter maintained a firm grasp on him.

Then, an enormous Wen Flag was lowered from the roof of the grand hall. The sheer size of the flag was enough to send a thrill down their spines. Following this momentous occasion, a resounding chorus of hundreds of voices rose in unison, creating an impressive and unforgettable sound.

“Congratulations on conquering Yunmeng, Wen-er-gongzi!”

The continuous and recurring chants of the Wen disciples instilled a deeply rooted sense of anger and tension within everyone. It was abundantly clear that the fight between the two clans was completely unfair, and therefore the emotions of the onlookers were entirely justified in the current scenario.

Madam Jin, on the other hand, was filled with a rush of emotions as haunting memories flooded her mind. The vivid recollection of the past made her feel not only disgusted but also furious. The sounds that echoed in the air bore a resemblance to the voices of their disciples, who were reciting words of praise and adulation to celebrate the victory of Jin Guangshan over the Wens that he imprisoned.

“Wen-er-gongzi,” a Wen disciple called. “The son and daughter of Yu Ziyuan and Jiang Fengmian, Jiang Wanyin and Jiang Yanli, and the head disciple, Wei Wuxian, are on the run.”

Those statements only fueled Jiang Wanyin's retaliation, prompting Wei Wuxian to grit his teeth from the effort of keeping his brother restrained, as well as the fact that he was still injured from the whip slashes.

The remembrance made Cangse Sanren and Wei Changze's faces darken.

“Just be still!" "Yu Ziyuan yelled, "Why are you so stubborn all the time?!”

“Charging forward without a plan means death,” Jiang Fengmian explained, adding, “Just run away with Wei Ying, A-Cheng!”

“Pass my order. Hunt down the remnants of Jiang Clan with full force!” Wen Chao ordered.

At those words, Jiang Wanyin's tolerance and forbearance snapped. He drew blood by biting through Wei Wuxian's hand. They shuffled as Wei Wuxian winced in pain. The movement created a noise.

“Who’s there?” Wen Chao shouted.

“Run!” the cultivators shouted.

Wen Chao promptly signaled with a slight nod of his head, and after a brief moment, Wen Zhuliu instantaneously sprang into action. He charged towards the wall that concealed the boys, rapidly traversing the distance with remarkable speed.

However, when Wen Zhuliu got to the other side of the wall was completely deserted and void of any human presence.

Everyone could not even breathe out a sigh of relief or rest.

Wei Wuxian and Jiang Wanyin were still on a run, and they’re still in that place, hiding carefully from Wen Zhuliu’s eyes.

“You could’ve just run away,” Wen Qing muttered in anxiousness.

It was also later on that her brother will also bring the brothers to her for help.

Wen Zhuliu scoured her surroundings with his eyes, carefully examining everything for any potential suspicious movement. Suddenly, his gaze drifted towards the waters, as he noticed a series of bubbles forming on the surface. This subtle occurrence was a clear indication that someone was submerged underneath.

Wen Zhuliu's hand was poised to strike, crackling with swirling streaks of crimson lightning-like energy.

"No!"

"Fuck, get away!"

He waited for them to emerge, and a moment later, a person came up to the surface. Instead of Wei Wuxian and Jiang Wanyin, it was Wen Ning.

Everyone let out the breath they'd been holding for so long.

"Ghost General saves the day again!" Jingyi cheered.

"Oh, thank god!"

Jiang Yanli immediately turned to Wen Ning with a wet smile and said, "Thank you."

"A-Ah, ehh," Wen Ning stuttered. "It was the right thing to do."

Really, had it not been for the presence of Wen Ning, the brothers would have been apprehended.

However, if Wen Ning were suspected of helping them, he would've been punished, the consequences would have entailed punishment. The mere contemplation of such a possibility made Wen Qing's heart constrict.

Soon, her brother may once again put himself in danger for the sake of Wei Wuxian and Jiang Wanyin, so she must prepare herself to witness it all.

In the midst of the situation, Yu Ziyuan did not know what to say to Wen Ning. She couldn't help but acknowledge the fact that he had already come to save the brothers twice. Should there be another circumstance that requires his aid in the future and he's able to assist Wei Wuxian and Jiang Wanyin once again, she would be more than grateful to express her appreciation towards him.

Only if she can do that.

Wen Zhuliu relaxes, and Wen Chao approached the docks, "Wen Ning? What are you doing there?"

"I… I missed a step."

'Thank you, uncle,' Sizhui thought and turned to the man with a smile. Wen Ning somehow got the message and nodded, returning his cousin's smile.

Because of that response, Wen Chao laughed and said, "Useless!"

The screen then darkened.

Shortly after, their attention was directed towards a mysterious cluster of trees in the dim light of dusk. Suddenly, the faint sounds of rumbling, wheezing, and strenuous effort caught their ears, indicating a possible altercation or conflict in the vicinity.

As time passed, the level of commotion generated by the altercation increased progressively, with the sound of heavy breathing and agonized grunting resonating throughout the hitherto tranquil clearing. Two individuals relentlessly exchanged blows, locked in grapple, as the guttural growls emitted by one of them took on an increasingly feral quality.

“Jiang Cheng, what are you doing?!” Wei Wuxian shouted, his voice raw and breaking. “Don’t go back there!”

Jin Ling’s eyes widened and exclaimed, “Jiujiu!”

“Idiot! Listen to him!” Yu Ziyuan shouted. “Stop trying to fight Wei Wuxian and go to Meishan! Dammit!”

In a gut-wrenching display of emotion, Wei Wuxian held Jiang Wanyin tightly, his arms locked around Jiang Wanyin's chest, in a desperate attempt to prevent him from running forward. The two boys were locked in a tense struggle, each vying for dominance. However, there was an undeniable intensity to their fight; this was a grueling test of pure physical strength as the two boys fought to come to terms with their pain and grief.

While Jiang Wanyin pushed with all his might, Wei Wuxian exerted force in the opposite direction, resulting in an intense tug of war. As Jiang Wanyin aimed for a strike, Wei Wuxian stood his ground, adamant and unyielding. The Jiang heir fought on, but Wei Wuxian remained steadfast, maintaining a sense of composure amidst the chaos.

“The Wens are still there! You’ll die if you return!” Wei Wuxian reasoned.

“Please, just go to Meishan,” Jiang Yanli implored; she couldn't stomach seeing her brothers in this state; why had things come to this?

“You’ll be caught if you scream there any further,” Mianmian warned, anxiety slowly consumed her. The forest they’re in, if she's correct, is between the borders of Yiling and Yunmeng.

They haven't gotten that far yet.

Wei Wuxian's statements enraged Jiang Wanyin even more. He growled, yanked, and hissed as he fought and struggled.

"I know you want vengeance, but now is not the time!" Wei Wuxian yelled again, attempting to persuade his brother. "You can't fight them this way!"

Jiang Wanyin was adamant on ignoring Wei Wuxian and fought harder.

Jiang Fengmian wanted to be angry at his son for blatantly refusing to heed Wei Ying's words, but he's more worried for their safety. Given their current location in the middle of nowhere, engaging in a heated argument is not only pointless but also dangerous. They needed to head straight to Meishan right now so that they'd be safe.

Jiang Fengmian sighed, "Stop fighting, A-Cheng."

"You know I can't," Jiang Wanyin said, his head bowed and fists clenched hard. "I recently lost both you and mum. I can't just sit here and do nothing."

Jiang Fengmian pointed out, "Even though seeking vengeance might seem like the right thing to do, it should not be pursued at the expense of alienating potential allies. At the moment, the Wen forces have successfully taken over Lotus Pier, which means that in order to accomplish your goal, it is imperative to form alliances with other factions."

"I know," Jiang Wanyin whispered.

"Did you forget what Yu-furen said?!"

After a prolonged period of resistance, Jiang Wanyin finally stopped moving. His previous state of animalistic growling was replaced with a calm and deep breathing

pattern. Wei Wuxian noticed this transition and felt relieved. As a result, he released his grip on his brother.

Wei Wuxian whispered, “Jiang Cheng, it’s never too late for revenge. We can—”

Jiang Wanyin turned and punched him.

Lan Wangji eyes widened and shouted, “Wei Ying!”

At the same time Cangse Sanren and Wei Changze also exclaimed, “A-Xian!”

The two moved apart; a bruise rapidly formed on Wei Wuxian’s face.

“Get lost!”

Wei Wuxian flinched, and he could feel the weight in his heart become even heavier with the situation at hand. Upon seeing this reaction, Lan Wangji glared at Jiang Wanyin. He was not concerned with how his behavior would be perceived by anyone else in the room.

Lan Qiren finds it difficult to scold his nephew upon observing the latter's facial expression.

“Why did you punch him?!” a female cultivator demanded.

Another one added, “He only tried to reason with you!”

Qingheng-jun and Madam Lan empathize with Jiang Wanyin's grief and trauma, fully recognizing that he is not in a rational state of mind, and thus they cannot hold him responsible for punching Wei Wuxian. However, they couldn't help but feel a sense of

disappointment in Jiang Wanyin for directing his anger towards Wei Wuxian. Wei Wuxian is also going through grief, yet he is putting on a brave face for Jiang Wanyin's sake.

“Why? Why?! Just why?” Jiang Cheng shouted, staggering towards Wei Wuxian. “Why did you have to save Lan Wangji?!”

Jiang Wanyin’s punch came in so swiftly that Wei didn’t even have a chance to defend himself. The only reason he didn’t fall was the grip Jiang Wanyin had on his collar.

Jiang Wanyin held onto Wei Wuxian's collar with a firm grip, causing the lapels of his shirt to tear apart and completely disabling Wei Wuxian's defenses.

“What?” Madam Lan muttered and turned to Jiang Wanyin with a frown. “What does saving my son have to do with this, Sect Leader Jiang?”

Jiang Wanyin did not even know what to respond to her.

“Why did you do that?!” he shouted, shaking Wei Wuxian back and forth, madness enveloping him.

“Why are you doing this?” Cangse Sanren asked darkly. “Wei Ying intervened after Wen Chao ordered the Wen disciples to kill Jin Zixuan and Lan Wangji. Wei Ying stepped in to save Lan Wangji; he talked back to Wen Chao, disarmed him, and even took him hostage, holding a sword to his throat. Are you implying that because of that, the Wens were provoked into attacking the Jiang sect? Are you lashing out at Wei Ying in your grief over your parents' deaths, or are you truly angry at my son for caring about Lan Wangji's life and not prioritizing the Jiang Sect's safety? ”

Triggered, Yu Ziyuan stepped in, “What are you—”

“But I know, deep down, you understand that even if my son had stood by and done nothing to save Lan Wangji, the Wens would still have attacked the Jiang sect eventually because

that's what they've planned in the beginning, and to build offices within Lotus Pier," Cangse Sanren continued, but her expression remained the same. "Regardless, you have no right to hurt Wei Ying like that."

Jiang Wanyin looked down in shame.

"A-Niang, it's fine!" Wei Wuxian intervened. "Jiang Cheng was not in the right mind—"

"Nonetheless, he cannot lash out at you," Wei Changze cuts his son off. "You had done nothing wrong."

"So what if Lan Wangji or Jin Zixuan die?! Just let them die! It's none of our business if they die! It's none of our clan's business! Why did this have to happen?!"

"Excuse me?" Qingheng-jun, Lan Xichen, and Madam Jin demanded simultaneously, looking at Jiang Wanyin for further explanation.

The same to what happened earlier, Jiang Wanyin could not respond to them.

The following punch knocked Wei Wuxian to the ground. On impact, the whip-wounds on his back screamed, and the bruises on his face grew darker and darker.

Sizhui whispered, "Stop—"

"Don't hurt him any further," Zizhen begged.

Then, Jiang Wanyin reached his hands forward, and wrapped them around Wei Wuxian's neck.

“No,” Lan Wangji whispered, his eyes widening as he realized what Jiang Wanyin was about to do.

“Get off. Get off. *Get off!”* Cangse Sanren yelled, turning to Jiang Wanyin. “Are you crazy?! After witnessing the deaths of your parents, you want my son killed as well?!”

“No!” Jiang Wanyin responded immediately, and he tried to form words in his mouth, but Jiang Fengmian intervened.

“Cangse Sanren, A-Cheng's mind is clouded by grief and trauma; he isn't rational right now; you must understand!”

“I do understand!” she yelled back. “But what I don't understand is why your son is hurting my son and spouting nonsense that has nothing to do with the destruction of Lotus Pier!”

“He’s—”

“Stop! Don’t talk anymore!” Cangse Sanren screamed in frustration. “The more I view these memories, the more I realize I need to protect my son from all of you.”

Horror formed in Jiang Wanyin’s face.

Meanwhile, all of the cultivators turned away from her murderous gaze.

“Why?!” Jiang Wanyin repeated, slowly adding tension to his hand until Wei Wuxian was gagging. “Why did you save Lan Wangji? Why did you have to speak up?! How many times have I told you not to stir up trouble?! Not to strike? Did you really want to play the hero that badly? Well, have you seen the result of you playing hero? Are you happy now?!”

Jiang Wanyin took a step forward, intending to offer his heartfelt apologies. However, his intentions were thwarted by Lan Wangji, Wei Changze, and Cangse Sanren, who stood between him and Wei Wuxian. The rejection he faced broke his heart, causing him to realize the gravity of the situation all over again.

‘I have no right to stand by his side anymore.’

“Don’t get near him,” Lan Wangji threatened, his hand already on the hilt of Bichen, ready to strike if he took another step.

Jiang Wanyin took a step back, his retreat causing a sharp pang in Wei Wuxian's heart. Wei Wuxian empathized deeply with his brother's emotional turmoil and was willing to endure further physical harm, even with his already sustained injuries, if it meant that Jiang Cheng could fully unleash his anger without risking a return to Yunmeng at this time.

‘You can’t step back, Jiang Cheng. We just reconciled; our relationship can’t be even more strained than this.’

“Go to hell!” Jiang Wanyin shouted squeezing even tighter. “They should all just go to hell!”

Wei Wuxian's face had turned bright red from the pressure. He moved his hand slowly to touch Jiang Wanyin's arm, murmuring, "Jiang Cheng."

Despite Wei Wuxian's desperate attempts to communicate with his Jiang Wanyin, the latter appeared oblivious to his words and continued choking him with a tremendous force. Wei Wuxian observed Jiang Wanyin's face transforming into an expression of madness, as an unsettling and crazed grin spread across his face. Rather than responding to Wei Wuxian, Jiang Wanyin started laughing, cackling uncontrollably while continuing to strangle Wei Wuxian with an unyielding grip.

Jiang Wanyin’s madness continued, and Wei Wuxian simply laid there and took it.

'This is wrong,' Jin Ling thought, his eyes widening in horror and disbelief.

Jin Ling had always known Wei Wuxian to be unbeatable, a true force to be reckoned with. Jin Ling had never witnessed Wei Wuxian lose a fight or back down from a challenge. Wei Wuxian's unwavering courage to take on any opponent and emerge victorious had earned him the respect of many, including Jin Ling himself. Furthermore, Wei Wuxian was not one to shy away from imparting some of his fighting knowledge even in the heat of battle—that's how Wei Wuxian is.

And yet, Wei Wuxian was being slammed to the ground and choked. Not once had he put up even the slightest bit of resistance.

His Jiujiu has the habit of hitting him, even during their playtime together. However, Wei Wuxian has never retaliated with physical aggression towards his Jiujiu.

Throughout Wei Wuxian's life, he has consistently taken on the role of the one who accepts all emotional pain and suffering, internalizing it rather than expressing it outwardly.

This is wrong. *So wrong!*

"Fight back, you idiot!" Jin Ling exclaimed, which startled most of the cultivators.

The sudden outburst of laughter sounded far from joyful. It persisted for what felt like an eternity as his hands tightened around Wei Wuxian's exposed and defenseless neck. But as quickly as the man's laughter began, it transformed into gut-wrenching sobs of unbearable pain. Jiang Wanyin's grip on Wei Wuxian's neck slowly slackened, and tears streamed down his face, landing on Wei Wuxian's battered and bruised visage.

Trembling, Jiang Wanyin shook with genuine sobs, and his cries made his voice crack in his misery.

"I want my parents back."

The cultivators' hearts were overcome with emotion as they heard Jiang Wanyin's cries filled with sorrow and pain. The ambiance in the temple was thick with tension, and the cultivators were unsure of how to relieve the weight of the moment.

Yu Ziyuan and Jiang Fengmian watched their young son weeping, resembling an injured dog's pained cries. The sight of their beloved child in such anguish caused them a deep sense of sorrow and discomfort.

“Jiujiu…”

‘Mournful wails will transform into triumphant hollers, making way for his newfound strength,’ Lan Xichen thought after recalling a memory. *‘He will be stronger after this.’*

Gradually, in a steady succession, tiny droplets of rain started descending from the overcast sky overhead. Amidst the downpour, Jiang Wanyin's gut-wrenching shouts of agony reverberated with even more intensity, heightening the sense of despair that had enveloped the entire world.

The screen then focused on Wei Wuxian as he raised one of his hands to cover his eyes, attempting to shield himself from the pouring rain.

“I want my mom and dad back!” Jiang Cheng repeated, screaming out in unparalleled grief.

Trembling, Wei Wuxian’s breathing was labored and he struggled to take in air. The physical abuse he had endured was evident through the pink bruises on his face, deep purple marks on his neck, and whip scars on his back. Despite his own pain, both his guardians had made it clear that he must prioritize Jiang Wanyin's safety above his own.

A tear finally fell down his face.

Cangse Sanren and Wei Changze were filled with a deep sense of protectiveness as they tightly embraced their beloved son. The overwhelming urge to shield him from the harsh realities of the world was almost palpable. If they were alive and became rogue cultivators, their son would be spared from the horrors of war, and would remain a beacon of brightness, innocence, and mischievousness. In their mind, they made a solemn vow to safeguard him at all costs, even if it meant shielding him from his friends or his former caretakers. (Yes, caretakers, not *family*. They are not his *family* anyway, nor is that family's residence considered his son's home.)

"No," a female cultivator mumbled, tears streaming down her cheeks. "Stop crying; you're making me cry."

Indeed, there were others among the cultivators who shared her sentiments. Jiang Wanyin's sorrow was undoubtedly significant, but Wei Wuxian had far greater responsibilities weighing on him, obliging him to assume the role of the stalwart pillar. Furthermore, Yu Ziyuan and Jiang Fengmian's statements served only to fortify his commitment to protect Jiang Wanyin.

But, in the end, the bond of the two broke, and everything went downhill for both of them.

The memory faded to black, then returned them to the usual white void.

"The memory has come to an end," Baoshan Sanren said as she turns around to see all of their faces.

A solemn atmosphere descended upon the temple as the cultivators took a moment to honor the lives of Jiang Fengmian and Yu Ziyuan. And even after the memory came to an end, the disciples cried; tears streamed down their faces, a testament to how broken they were from that memory.

'Why are all of your faces in anguish? Are you weighed down by the destruction of Lotus Pier? Mired in Jiang Wanyin's cry of agony? Or Wei Wuxian's burdens and tears? Either of these options, some of you do not have the right to be feeling these emotions,' Baoshan Sanren thought, her face as solemn as ever.

“You can all rest or talk for a while,” Baoshan Sanren reminded. “The next memory will be even more intense so prepare yourselves.”

“W-What do you mean?” Madam Jin inquired, but the immortal did not respond and exited the temple.

Those who held a grudge against Wei had chosen to maintain their silence, right from the beginning of their acquaintance with him up until the end.

Despite their resolve to hate him for eternity, they couldn't help but feel uncertain by the fact that he was, at one point in time, just a helpless young boy who was bereft of his true family. They were forced to acknowledge the fact that, prior to his transformation into the most feared man he eventually became, he was just another human being struggling to make his way in the world. Having witnessed the catastrophic collapse of Lotus Pier, they were finally able to understand the reasons why he had denigrated into the Yiling Patriarch and resorted to practicing demonic cultivation.

However, that does not mean they support or condone these actions. While it is true that the use of such unconventional and morally questionable methods led to the downfall of the Wen Clan, this power, unfortunately played a significant role in the Sunshot Campaign.

“I’m sorry.”

Wei Changze and Cangse Sanren broke the embrace and gazed down at Jiang Wanyin, who is now bowing down before them.

He continued, “I know what I did was wrong. I could’ve killed Wei Wuxian too because of my anger and grief. I do not ask forgiveness from either of you or Wei Ying, but I wanted to convey my regret for what I did.”

Cangse Sanren quickly glanced at Jiang Fengmian and Yu Ziyuan, trying to understand their reactions. While Yu Ziyuan seemed to be processing everything silently, her face devoid of

any emotions, Jiang Fengmian appeared visibly distressed seeing his son bow down to his former friends in an attempt to ease the tension between them.

“You recognize your faults; I am glad,” Cangse Sanren responded. “But I will have you know that what you did made me wary of you.”

“I understand,” Jiang Wanyin responded.

“Rise,” Wei Changze ordered and Jiang Wanyin did so. The latter stared them in the eyes with a determined expression. “I hope this is the last time I see you hurting my son.”

Jiang Wanyin’s mouth gaped.

‘Good news, Wei Wuxian has died!’

‘The Yiling Patriarch has died? Who could’ve killed him?’

‘Who other than his shidi, Jiang Wanyin!’

He closed his mouth and swiftly lowered his head once more, abstaining from speaking any further. The action heightened Wei Changze and Cangse Sanren's apprehension towards him.

Behind Cangse Sanren and Wei Changze, Lan Wangji tenderly caressed Wei Wuxian's neck as though he was worried that applying too much pressure might cause pain. The gentle gesture was enough to bring a brief smile to Wei Wuxian's face.

“Lan Zhan, this neck is strong, you know. Your hand also—”

"This is not the time to joke around, Wei Ying," Lan Wangji replied, his voice hard yet soft at the same time.

"Aiyaa, you were so sad; I can't let that expression rest on your face," Wei Wuxian said, touching his husband's cheeks.

“I have the right to be sad.”

Wei Wuxian’s smile dropped, “At the time, Jiang Cheng was mentally unstable. If anything, I don't want to make him any angrier by fighting back.”

“You won’t fight back,” Lan Wangji pointed out. “I know you. You won’t hurt your brother at all.”

“Ah, well..”

“Wei Ying,” a voice called, and Wei Wuxian turned around to see Jiang Fengmian.

“Jiang-zongzhu,” he greeted, bowing respectfully at him.

"I just wanted to say," Jiang Fengmian paused, staring at Wei Wuxian's countenance for a second before continuing, "you have to know that the last words I said apply not only to you, but to A-Cheng as well."

Confused, Wei Wuxian and Jiang Wanyin simultaneously asked, “What?”

“I wanted both of you to protect each other.”

Wei Wuxian was surprised. He had already anticipated that Madam Yu and Jiang Fengmian would choose their own son’s well-being over his, but the reality of it still managed to catch him off guard. This act confirmed, beyond any doubt, that he was an outsider to their family. Anyone else's loyalty would have been shattered by such words.

However, something is wrong with Jiang Fengmian's words right now.

“Are you being a hypocrite right now, Jiang Fengmian?” Cangse Sanren interjected, and Wei Wuxian and Jiang Fengmian both looked at her, stunned.

“What—”

“If you wanted them to protect each other, you should’ve said those words properly,” Cangse Sanren cuts Jiang Fengmian off, frowning at him. “Those words placed a tremendous burden on my son's shoulders." Did you know the person to whom you said those words was a young boy who can only do much? Or did you did not care and said it anyway?”

Jiang Fengmian admits to being mistaken in his choice of words. However, in that crucial moment, there was nothing more paramount to him than ensuring his son's safety, with Wei Ying being a secondary concern.

"Whatever your response is, it's useless," Cangse Sanren remarked, glaring at him. “However, if those words ever return to my son's mind in the next memory, I will hold you responsible if something happens to him while he's protecting your son. Same goes for you, Yu Ziyuan.”

Hearing her name being mentioned, Yu Ziyuan threw her a glare as well.

‘They will, mother,’ Wei Wuxian thought and glanced at his mother. *'Those words keep coming back to me, almost consuming me.'*

For a moment, the temple fell silent as tension rose even higher than before.

“Ah.”

Lan Wangji turned to his husband and asked, “What is it, Wei Ying?”

“I need to talk to the Immortal for a second,” he responded. “Did you happen to notice where she went?”

“She went to that hallway,” Lan Wangji said, pointing to the west corridor.

“Alright, thanks love.”

Wei Wuxian asked permission from his parents to talk to the immortal before exiting the main hall. As he made his way down the hallway, he suddenly sensed a presence emanating from one of the nearby rooms. Coming to a halt in the middle of the hallway, Wei Wuxian carefully concentrated to pinpoint the exact location of the presence. As soon as he located the source, he quickly made his way towards it. Upon reaching the door, Wei Wuxian was taken aback.

“Why are you here?”

Chapter End Notes

Wew, that was a lot to process! The angst is here, and there will be plenty more of it soon! Expect that the next chapter will be published between October and November.

If there's any error in the names or grammatical errors, please let me know.

Anyway, thank you for reading!

Loyal Heart

Chapter Notes

> Greetings, esteemed readers! Pray forgive the tardiness in the release of this chapter. An event took place at my university, demanding considerable preparation on my part. As a member of a dance group and a participant in a poetry writing competition, my time was fully occupied. Nevertheless, I am pleased to finally present the long-awaited chapter for your enjoyment. Without further ado, please indulge yourselves in its contents.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

As Wei Wuxian made his way down the hallway, he suddenly sensed a presence emanating from one of the nearby rooms. Coming to a halt in the middle of the hallway, he carefully concentrated on pinpointing the exact location of the presence. As soon as he located the source, he quickly made his way towards it. Upon reaching the door, he was taken aback.

“Why are you here?”

Wen Qing gazed upon him, a mixture of confusion and surprise etched on her features. Baoshan Sanren, however, seemed unfazed by his sudden arrival, as if she had anticipated his presence from the beginning. It was almost as though she had foreseen his decision to follow behind her.

“I should be asking you that,” Wen Qing countered and crossed her arms as she continued to ask, “Why are you here?”

“I need to speak to Baoshan Sanren; how about you?” he asked, his brow rising in confusion.

“I also have some business with the Immortal,” she responded.

Wei Wuxian was feeling baffled as he gazed at the two who were standing together as it was a rare sight for him to witness. As the memory viewing progressed, not once had he seen them interact together and their current posture suggested that they were secretly discussing something. Although Wei Wuxian couldn't exactly pinpoint what the two were up to, the atmosphere in the room was oozing with a suspicious energy.

“You’re both suspicious,” he blurted out.

Wen Qing shrugged and responded, “I don’t know what you’re talking about.”

“See?!” Wei Wuxian exclaimed. “You just proved my point!”

“What point?” Wen Qing frowned. “You’re suspicious too, you know! What do you want with the Immortal?”

Wen Qing felt relieved that her conversation with Baoshan Sanren was interrupted before Wei Wuxian intruded into room. The last thing she wanted was for Wei Wuxian to discover their secret plan. Currently, their topmost priority is to inform Wei Wuxian's parents about the plan before taking any further steps.

“I told you I need to speak to Baoshan Sanren.”

On the side, Baoshan sighed fondly and decided to intervene, speaking, “Now, now, stop bickering. I’ll grant you both a minute’s worth of audience.”

Wen Qing couldn't help but sigh exasperatedly. She was well aware of the fact that the immortal was unlikely to divulge any information to Wei Wuxian at this point, but it was still making her uneasy. The reason for Wei Wuxian's sudden visit likely had to do with his brutal memories.

Without hesitation, Wei Wuxian opened up to Baoshan Sanren about his concerns, and she was not taken aback since she had foreseen this. He elaborated on the insignificance of

certain memories, and how it would be best to leave them behind in his past. Being on the receiving end of the cultivator's pity was a disgusting feeling.

"No," Baoshan Sanren responded after he finished explaining which caused Wei Wuxian to freeze.

Slightly taken aback and offended, Wei Wuxian responded, "Excuse me?"

"Wei Wuxian, we already talked about this. I understand the need to exclude some memories from your past since they're unbelievingly… dark and torturous to some. However, the purpose of having the cultivators witness your memories is for them to hear the side of your story and understand what you've been through. I am being selfish, and I want nothing but for them to feel guilty for what they've done to you," Baoshan Sanren explained solemnly.

"They really don't need to know everything that happened," Wei Wuxian responded as he looked tiredly at the ground. "As if their perspective of me will change. I've been the nightmare of their lives for thirteen years. I have treaded paths stained with darkness, paths that others deem unworthy and evil. Such memories will be disregarded since—"

"What, because you're the villain? The scum of the cultivation world?" Baoshan Sanren interjected, feeling slightly furious. "Wei Wuxian, the path you've chosen is different from the conventional ways of our cultivation world, but within your heart lies a brilliance that cannot be dimmed by the shadows that dance around you. People shouldn't invalidate your story. Every character in every story, whether they're the hero or the villain, their story needs to be explored in a meaningful way. Do you understand what I'm saying, Wei Wuxian?"

The man in question remained silent, deep in thought. He does understand the reasoning behind his grandmaster's words, but he struggles to grasp the necessity of witnessing his dark and murky past to those cultivators. While he acknowledged that a large part of his reluctance to do so stemmed from self-interest, his fear of reliving those haunting memories cannot be denied. The mere thought of revisiting his brutal past fills him with trepidation.

Wei Wuxian's voice quivered with a mixture of trepidation and frustration as he gazed intensely on the ground. He posed the question, "Do my hesitations and fears mean nothing to you? Don't I have the right to say *no*?" His fists were clenched so tightly that his knuckles had turned white, accentuating the intensity of his emotions.

Baoshan Sanren took a step forward and gently placed her hand on Wei Wuxian's shoulder before speaking, “Your hesitations and fears are valid, Wei Wuxian, and I do not discount them. However, within every shadow lies the potential for light, and it is through witnessing both your triumphs and tribulations that we’ll find true enlightenment. Not everyone is like you, Wei Wuxian. Your story is not one of unrelenting darkness; it is a tapestry woven with threads of compassion, bravery, and sacrifice.”

When she noticed that Wei Wuxian was in deep thought, she continued, “Your heart of gold has always guided you, Wei Wuxian, even when the path ahead seemed darkest. Trust in the strength of your convictions, and know that your sacrifices have not gone unnoticed. I will make sure they all know what you have gone through. The cultivation world may be slow to embrace everything, but with time, even the most hardened hearts can be softened by the light of truth.”

‘Is this right? Is she right?’ Wei Wuxian pondered. *‘If their perception of me were to shift, what repercussions might ensue? How should I interpret and understand their sudden change? Would it have the power to erase all the anguish and torment that I have endured in my innermost being? It is undeniable that change is an unyielding and inevitable force in life; however, mental and personal development remains a choice that lies within our own volition.’*

Wen Qing frowned at the Immortal. After a moment of silence, Wei Wuxian sighed. Whatever, he doesn’t care anymore. Whatever they’re going to see soon and whatever their reaction will be, he does not care anymore. However, he worries for his husband and his parents. He does not want them to see how his life became so pathetic and dark.

“J-Just leave me out of it,” Wei Wuxian said as he turned around, ready to leave the room. “Don’t let me relive those memories again.”

Baoshan Sanren was quick to respond, “Of course.”

Wei Wuxian stood motionless for a brief moment, his spirits deflated, before ultimately mustering the resolve to exit the room. His shoulders sagged with a sense of defeat and resignation. Without any delay, Wen Qing, brimming with irritation, directed an intense and piercing glare towards the immortal, the intensity magnified manifold.

“You truly exhibit a remarkable level of selfishness, Immortal Baoshan Sanren, showing a distinct lack of consideration for others and prioritizing your desires above all else.”

Baoshan Sanren's gaze hardened, her patience waning as she met Wen Qing's piercing stare with a steely resolve of her own, “And what do you want me to do, Wen-guniang? Spare him from confronting the demons that haunt his past, shield him from the truth that threatens to consume him? Sometimes, growth requires facing the darkness within, no matter how uncomfortable it may be.”

“But at what cost? You speak of growth as if it justifies the pain inflicted upon him. Have you no empathy for the turmoil he endures?” Wen Qing asked, her voice laced with frustration.

Baoshan Sanren's lips formed a thin line, her eyes narrowing as she bristled at Wen Qing's accusation and responded, “Empathy? Do not presume to lecture me on empathy, Wen-guniang. I have witnessed more suffering than you can imagine, and I would not subject Wei Wuxian to this if I did not believe it to be necessary for his sake.”

Wen Qing’s glare was unwavering as she argued, "You may deem it necessary, but your actions have consequences, Immortal Baoshan Sanren. You’re using Wei Wuxian for your own vendetta. He deserves more than to be treated as a pawn in your grand design.”

Baoshan Sanren's jaw clenched, her frustration simmering beneath the surface as she struggled to contain her emotions, “I know, but whether you agree with my methods or not, I will persist until this is over, even if it means enduring your misguided accusations."

Wen Qing grew tired of the discussion, thus she let out a sigh and gently squeezed the bridge of her nose to compose herself, “We can continue this conversation at a later time.”

After making that statement, Wen Qing exited the room, leaving Baoshan Sanren behind feeling a combination of frustration and exhaustion. She let out a heavy sigh, her gaze fixated on the window as she reflected upon the words she had uttered earlier. Contemplating them further, she finally made the decision to also depart from the room, determined to resume the memory viewing.

“This is my anger and my revenge for you, Wei Wuxian.”

Shortly after, the cultivators, with an air of anticipation, found their places and quieted down, adjusting themselves into a comfortable position. The atmosphere was charged with anxiousness as they eagerly awaited the start of the memory viewing session, which Baoshan Sanren had just announced would begin in a matter of minutes.

Lan Sizhui and Wen Ning exchanged a meaningful glance, their eyes locking on each other when they detected the ominous expression on Wen Qing's face. In reality, they had been aware of the change in her demeanor ever since she returned from her break. An air of unease surrounded her, which left them curious to uncover the underlying cause. However, mindful of Wen Qing's emotional state, they decided against prying into her personal matters at that moment. They believed it would be more appropriate to approach her later, once she had calmed down. Nevertheless, even though they refrained from prying, they couldn't help but experience a lingering sense of suspicion, an unshakable feeling that there was something amiss.

When Baoshan Sanren and Wen Qing returned, it was noticeable that they both shared the same expression, suggesting that they might have engaged in a conversation prior to their return. This similarity in their expression hints at the possibility that their earlier conversation possibly led to a misunderstanding or some sort of miscommunication between them.

“I hope they don’t get caught by those Wen-dogs,” an unknown cultivator whispered.

Lan Wangji and Jiang Wanyin heard this and clenched their fists. Knowing what really happened, their hearts began to beat rapidly in anxiousness.

When the day began to light up, Jiang Cheng had almost numbed. He did not want to wake up in a bush of weeds with his head almost bursting apart, having been through an entire night of cold wind, and discovering that he was still curled up behind a barren little hill.

Throughout the night, he had somehow managed to sleep a couple of times due to exhaustion from crying and hoping for everything to be just a terrible nightmare.

“In just a single night, the Jiangs lost everything they had,” Song Lan said, and the rest of the cultivators and the Jiangs flinched at his words.

The Wens possessed such immense power that they could effortlessly annihilate numerous clans in a single night if they so desired. This very realization struck deep within their hearts, instilling in them an overwhelming sense of rage coupled with bone-chilling fear.

The first to move was Wei Wuxian.

Clutching his wounded form, he summoned the strength to stand and spoke with a hoarse voice, “Let’s go.”

Lan Qiren couldn’t even believe the fact that Wei Wuxian, despite all the challenges and hardships he had faced, was once again persevering and working towards finding a solution in order to survive. Not only had Wei Wuxian already lost his biological parents, but now he had also lost his foster parents and the stability of the home he had grown accustomed to. It seemed logical for him to assume that Wei Wuxian would be feeling even worse than Jiang Cheng, given the immense weight of these losses. Yet, upon reflection, he realized that he shouldn't be entirely surprised.

Going back to the Xuanwu Cave and experiencing hopelessness and weakness for the first time, Wei Wuxian had always been the type of person who sought out solutions to problems, regardless of how difficult they may be for him or others. His natural inclination to take charge and lead others had always been evident. However, Wei Wuxian was not the leader now; he was the older brother, and he had the heavy responsibility of ensuring Jiang Cheng’s safety as they navigated through the perils that lay ahead.

Letting out a deep sigh, Lan Qiren couldn't help but acknowledge the weight of his concerns for the two brothers. Although he refrained from vocalizing his apprehension, deep down, he genuinely felt a sense of worry. The image of their relentless struggle to survive amidst the unforgiving streets played vividly in his mind, imagining the constant state of vigilance they must maintain to escape the enemies.

Jiang Wanyin did not move at all, but Wei Wuxian pulled at him and repeated the same words, to which the former responded with his voice dry and cracking, “Go where?”

Jiang Wanyin winced at his other self's behavior and begged, “Damn, just listen to him.”

Wei Wuxian replied, “To the MeishanYu Sect. To find Shijie.”

“You should’ve done that from the beginning!” Yu Ziyuan hissed. However, looking at the two brothers, mainly, Wei Wuxian, she couldn’t help but feel a heavy weight in her chest that she couldn’t name.

Whatever it was, it was eating her up, and she did not like it in the slightest.

Jiang Wanyin waved his outstretched hand away. Then, a few moments later, he finally sat up on his own and slowly got up.

The two then set off in the direction of Meishan by foot.

Secretly, all of the cultivators internally cheered, expressing their wish for the brothers to arrive at Meishan safely while some hoped that they’d be caught by the Wens, most especially, Wei Wuxian.

They couldn’t stand seeing him this pathetic. He’s the Yiling Patriarch for Pete’s sake! They needed him to do something for them to hate him to the core and not feel any sort of complicated feelings for him.

Moments later, they were brought into a dull and dark town not far away from Yunmeng, and the civilians walking around were talking, gossiping to be exact.

One of them exclaimed in shock, “Yunmeng Jiang Clan?!”

“Isn’t it the most prominent cultivation clan in the Jing-Chu region?” One civilian asked as well.

One civilian responded, “It was. But even so, it couldn’t outshine the sun, could it?”

“It might be crazy what I’m about to say,” Wei Wuxian smirked bitterly.

“Look at what’s written there.”

At the same time, Wei Wuxian passed behind them, wearing a straw hat that covered half of his face. He glanced at the civilians and lifted his hat to look at the posters on the wall.

He frowned.

Jin Ling gasped, “T-That’s—!”

“What the hell is this, huh?!” Jingyi exclaimed as well, his teeth and fists clenched tightly.

On the walls were accurately drawn pictures of Jiang Yanli, Jiang Wanyin, and Wei Wuxian, the three siblings now on the wanted list.

All of the cultivators scowled and growled in anger.

“How the fuck are they—!” A-Qing exclaimed as well which earned her a reprimand from Xiao Xingchen. Despite being scolded, the burning flame of hatred blazed in her heart. ’*Those Wen-dogs!’* she thought.

“They really want every Jiang gone,” Mianmian whispered, her eyes blazing in anger.

Cangse Sanren and Wei Changze gazed at the accurately drawn picture of their son and the Jiang siblings. These three were just kids and were at their prime, yet here they are, being the target of the Wens. The desire to kill those Wens was strong, but cannot do anything about it. They just hoped that the three would arrive at Meishan and receive care for the wounds the Wens had inflicted on them.

“**It was once such a grand and vibrant household!” Someone said and the Jiangs, once again, flinched at the words. “But now, all are past and gone!”**

Yeah right, vibrant…

“Mortal affairs are indeed transient and unpredictable.”

Wei Wuxian heard enough and tilted his hat down as he continued to walk away. He needed to act fast before the Wen Dogs attack Meishan Yu and endanger his shijie.

Right as Wei Wuxian walked away from those civilians, he heard them talking once again, and this time, he paused.

“I heard that this disaster was caused by that Head Disciple of Yunmeng Jiang Clan.”

“Why the fuck are we back to blaming him again?” Jin Zixuan asked, his tone eerily low, obviously stating that he was incredibly upset on Wei Wuxian’s behalf.

“I mean—”

“Not a word from you, Wei Wuxian!” Jiang Wanyin yelled, glaring at his brother while Wei Wuxian immediately shut his mouth. Even Lan Wangji couldn’t afford to get upset at Jiang Wanyin because he, too, would not like to hear his husband blame himself again.

None of this was ever his fault, and some of the cultivators were beginning to realize that.

A civilian protested, “Only you would believe such nonsense. I bet Wen Ruohan drew lots to decide which clan to attack first.”

Nie Huaisang scoffed, “See? Even they have more common sense than most people.”

Nie Mingjue sighed, “I hear your point, Huaisang.”

“What Clan do you think will be targeted next?”

“...Hard to tell.”

As he glanced up once more, his heart skipped a beat. Two Wen soldiers prowled the town streets, their vigilant eyes scanning the surroundings for any signs of them. With a sense of urgency, Wei Wuxian swiftly averted his gaze, retreating to a distant stall to evade their watchful gaze.

Multiple cultivators gasped in shock and clenched their fists.

“Of course, they’re here,” Song Lan scowled.

“A-Xian, run away!” Jiang Yanli nervously warned her brother.

Wen Clan was really moving fast in finding the siblings. Although the town they’re in isn’t as far as Yunmeng, it is surprising and unsurprising at the same time, that they have arrived here in a short amount of time given that they’ve just completely destroyed Yunmeng Jiang and compiled countless dead bodies. For sure these men only followed a direction they could possibly think of where the brothers had gone.

‘Please,’ Wen Qing internally begged, *‘let them find A-Ning fast!’*

“So right now, we just let Qishan Wen Clan do whatever they want? Even Yunmeng Jiang Clan was wiped out.”

“Any cultivation clan with some fame has kept silent out of fear. Us in small clans, what can we possibly do? Just look out for ourselves.”

Madam Jin and Nie Mingjue cursed, yet they contemplated the man's words carefully.

“That mindset is literally what caused all of this," Madam Lan said, sighing at the whole situation going on.

Some were eager to protest, saying that it wasn't out of fear that drove them to stay in the corner and silence, or that she never really experienced war firsthand for her to say it so easily like that, and yet they also realize how Madam Lan's words were correct. Even Lan Qiren didn't say anything and just sighed.

Once the Wen soldiers vanished from sight once more, Wei Wuxian raised his head slightly, scanning the surroundings before resuming his journey.

Meanwhile, within the confines of dilapidated walls, Jiang Wanyin stood in silence, his gaze fixed blankly on Zidian as he idly twirled it around his finger. It was a familiar gesture, one that mirrored the habits of both his mother and his older self when consumed by anger.

To Jiang Cheng in the present moment, Zidian served as the sole tangible connection to his parents.

Jiang Fengmian moved closer. He longed to offer comfort to his son in whatever way he could, and Jiang Wanyin, though grateful for the effort, silently acknowledged his father's gesture.

Yu Ziyuan, however, looked at her adult son and realized how small her simulated son was compared to now. He had grown as a man with a higher position and a level of assertiveness and authority she had long wished he'd shaped into, and yet right now, she was starting to feel uneasy.

Was it right for her to leave him? Was it right to force him to be the person she wanted him to be? Was it right for her to look down on him despite the fact that she wanted him to aim higher?

Wei Wuxian arrived and kneeled down before Jiang Cheng, saying, "I scouted this area, and we're a few days' journey away from Meishan. We'll just have to watch out for Wen-dogs patrolling the roads, and we'll meet Shijie in no time."

Jiang Wanyin remained unresponsive and kept twisting the ring on his finger.

Jin Ling's heart broke. He can understand his uncle's pain all too well as he also acted this way when he was little after being bullied by countless children. His uncle comforted him despite his harsh nature, too. As a child, his parents were a complete stranger to him. Although he had seen some pictures and heard some stories about them, it excited him and made him curious, yet he did not feel any sort of connection with them from that. But when his parents were brought back by Baoshan Sanren, despite not remembering them, he immediately loved them at first sight and hugged them as if his life depended on them.

Anyway, he had seen his Uncle cry in silence and never bothered to say anything, fearing that he might break his legs, but that did not mean it did not worry him. Right now, all he wanted to do was enter the screen and just do whatever he could to comfort his uncle. The loss his Uncle is feeling must be ten times worse than the grief he had been carrying his whole life.

"Jiujiu," he says softly, and Jiang Wanyin turns to him, sighing before ruffling his hair and proceeding to say silent.

“L-Lotus Pier…” he tried, then set a hand on Jiang Wanyin’s shoulder and continued. “We’ll go back to Lotus Pier one day, but not now, okay? Uncle Jiang and Yu-furen laid down their lives to save yours. If you die here for nothing, wouldn’t it be wasting their sacrifices?”

Without waiting for his brother to respond, Wei Wuxian stood up. He’s uncertain about leaving him, but he has to, so he orders, “Sit here. I’ll buy us some food. Don’t be reckless and run off somewhere.”

An older brother. The older brother—that is what is Wei Wuxian right now to the simulation's Jiang Wanyin. The level of care Wei Wuxian was giving Jiang Cheng has left cultivators feeling a splash of affection and heartbreak. Even in the worst circumstances possible, Wei Wuxian was prioritizing other people—his brother.

No matter what, Wei Wuxian had always been the more caring one than most people, and this brought shame to Jiang Wanyin’s whole being.

“Sorry,” Jiang Cheng whispered, watching his brother leave.

“You don’t need to be sorry for acting that way, Jiang Cheng,” Wei Wuxian responded, smiling softly, as if he’s trying to console a child, which he is; healing Jiang Wanyin’s inner child in a way.

Wei Wuxian overcame his hesitation and made the difficult decision to depart. Jiang Wanyin, devoid of any emotion, raised his eyes and observed Wei Wuxian's retreating form.

Simultaneously, rain began to descend from the heavens.

Wei Wuxian then lowered his hat and proceeded to purchase several buns for Jiang Wanyin. He conversed in hushed tones with the vendor, ensuring that their interaction attracted minimal attention. Surprisingly, the civilians surrounding him remained oblivious to any peculiarities, despite their prior encounters with Wei Wuxian. The plan was proceeding smoothly.

However, as Jiang Wanyin shifted his focus, his gaze fixated upon a group of Wens.

Yu Ziyuan tightened her fists, her voice filled with urgency as she exclaimed, “What are you —,” However, before she could complete her inquiry, her attention was diverted to the advancing Wens. The sight sent shivers down the spines of nearly everyone present, their horror palpable. The Wens were slowly approaching the still-oblivious Wei Wuxian.

“Why aren’t you moving?!” Nie Mingjue exclaimed in frustration, his concern for the oblivious Wei Wuxian evident. "Move!" he commanded.

Yet, Wei Wuxian continued his conversation with the food vendor, oblivious to the impending danger. With each step the Wens took, they drew nearer. Another step and their approach persisted.

“Shit, run!” Jin Zixuan exclaimed urgently.

“Run, Wei-qianbei!” The disciples chorused.

But with each passing step, the Wens grew perilously close.

“Fuck it, move!” An unknown cultivator ordered in frustration. “Run away!

Jiang Wanyin's gaze remained fixed on the approaching Wens, and at that moment, he made his decision to take action.

They were still at a distance that Wei Wuxian had yet to notice them, but close enough for Jiang Wanyin to potentially intercept him.

“What are you trying to do, A-Cheng?!” Jiang Fengmian demanded, his heart pounding in nervousness and the need to protect him was overwhelming.

“A-Cheng, if you take one more step,” The Jiang Matriarch threatened, her fierce gaze burning holes at her son’s back. “I will break your legs!”

With unsteady legs and eyes full of malice, Jiang Cheng sprinted out, aiming to draw the attention of the Wen disciples away from his brother.

Wei Wuxian, however, remained oblivious to his departure from the alley.

Yet, the Wens were quick to notice.

A-Cheng!" The voice of Jiang Yanli resonated through the air.

Wei Wuxian's eyes widened, and he swiftly turned his head towards Jiang Wanyin, who was deliberately avoiding eye contact.

In his mind, Wei Wuxian vehemently denied the truth, causing his hands to tremble uncontrollably. *‘No,’* he thought, *‘H-He couldn't have...!’*

“Jiang Cheng, you—”

Suddenly, the screen flickered, causing the rain in the current scene to overlap with a glimpse of a future scene. In this new scene, Jiang Cheng knelt on the ground, his hair cascading gracefully as the wind playfully danced with it. However, the emotions that consumed the future Jiang Cheng were what caught their attention. He was engulfed in anguish, tears welling up in the corners of his eyes.

“What gives you the audacity to withhold such a crucial thing from me?” he questioned, his voice heavy with pain and sorrow.

The scene shifted once again. Jin Ling and Jiang Wanyin now stood outside the Guanyin Temple.

“Jiujiu, didn’t you have something to tell Wei Wuxian?” he asked.

Jiang Wanyin's mind began to recall the sacrifice he had made, and he let out a bitter sigh, "There is nothing to be said. Some things are meant to be kept within ourselves."

“Jiang Cheng!” Wei Wuxian exclaimed, gripping his brother's shirt collar tightly. “I understand that you have sacrificed yourself for me, but are you out of your goddamn mind?!”

Jiang Wanyin vehemently challenged, “By what authority do you dare utter such words?!” In a fervent retort, he continued, "You, too, made a sacrifice on my behalf. Why then, are you angry with this?! Is this not an equitable arrangement for both of us?!"

Wei Wuxian, his jaw clenched tightly, fixed an intense gaze upon him and declared, “I bestowed upon you something of immense value to me, so that you may flourish and restore the Jiang Clan to its former glory once you assume leadership. I did it to empower you, even in my absence!”

“Fuck you!” Jiang Wanyin bellowed, seizing the collar of Wei Wuxian's shirt in a fierce grip. “I fled because I knew that even if they were to snatch away something important to me, you would steadfastly remain at my side. I still have loved ones to return to, and I am certain that even if I were to be rendered incapacitated, you would willingly become my loyal subordinate!”

The atmosphere in the room grew increasingly tense, reaching a suffocating level. The ongoing argument between the brothers was only complicating matters further. Sensing the escalating tension, Wei Changze and Jiang Fengmian intervened and pulled their sons apart.

Even as the brothers were separated, Wei Wuxian couldn't help but ask, his voice now softer and tinged with resignation, “Jiang Cheng, did you ever consider telling me everything?”

Jiang Wanyin did not respond and just looked away.

Very well, the silence spoke volumes. It was evident that Jiang Wanyin, being a proud man, would rather take this secret to his grave than reveal the truth. Wei Wuxian could understand, as he too had felt the need to keep his sacrifices hidden.

Regardless, this argument was leading them nowhere. They would have to address the issue at a later time.

“That's a Yunmeng uniform!” exclaimed one of the Wen disciples. In an instant, the entire group sprang into action, chasing after Jiang Wanyin.

The cultivator's attention returned to the screen. The abrupt transition from witnessing an argument to the continuation of the memory created an uncomfortable atmosphere.

Despite Jiang Wanyin’s exhaustion and dizziness caused by hunger and grief, he persisted in his escape. Even when he stumbled, he managed to regain his footing. However, the Wens gradually closed in on him. The gap between them grew smaller and smaller until, finally, he tripped and...

The screen faded to black.

The room was filled with heavy breaths as the cultivators attempted to calm themselves after the intense rush of adrenaline. They reassured themselves that Jiang Wanyin would be alright, as evidenced by his presence here as the Secret Leader of the Jiang Clan. That he would grow stronger, healthier, wealthier, and more powerful.

As the reality of the situation sank in, Yu Ziyuan firmly grasped her son's shoulders and forced him to face her, her voice filled with anger. “Are you trying to get yourself killed?!”

“A-Niang, I understand what I did was very—”

“Stupid? Yes, it definitely was!” she exclaimed. “You should have stayed put and waited for Wei Wuxian!” And as if her anger intensified, she demanded, “Is this the part where you sacrificed yourself?! By letting those Wen-dogs capture you?! Were you attempting to squander the life I sacrificed for your sake?! Are you that dumb?!”

“I..” Jiang Wanyin, unable to find the right words, bowed his head in shame. He did, at some point, think about making the right decision of sacrificing himself. However, when faced with the choice between surviving and saving his beloved brother, he would always choose the latter. He would rather face death than witness Wei Wuxian's death.

“Yu Ziyuan, I believe such words are not befitting of a mother speaking to her son,” Qingheng-jun intervened with a solemn look on his face.

Lan Qiren agreed, “Indeed. Instead of reacting with anger, it would be more appropriate to acknowledge his courage.”

Yu Ziyuan was shocked, “What?! How can I praise his bravery when he's facing those Wen-dogs?! They're going to kill him!”

“I assure you, A-Niang, I will be fine!” Jiang Wanyin interrupted.

“Fine?! They had already taken you captive! Who knows what torture they subjected you to?!”

Yes, he had indeed endured torture. However, he had no intention of divulging that information. Only when the memories resurface will he consider sharing some details.

The resounding echoes of thunder reverberated through the air, heralding the arrival of a torrential downpour. The raindrops cascaded with great force into the swift currents of the majestic Gusu Mountains, gracefully transforming into glistening waterfalls as they descended from the towering cliffs.

Deep within the sacred confines of the Cloud Recesses' Ancestral Shrine, a candle flickered, its flame was tended to by a hand exuding grace and poise.

"Wangji," a venerable elder of the Lan clan addressed, causing the young boy to divert his gaze from the mesmerizing flame and establish eye contact.

"Respected Great Uncle," Lan Wangji respectfully saluted, bowing with utmost reverence.

Lan Qiren, Qingheng-jun, and Madam Lan fervently prayed for favorable news. The mere thought of any unfortunate event would undoubtedly elevate their blood pressure, especially if it involved the whereabouts of Lan Huan, who had gone missing.

“I have heard that you dispatched disciples to Yunmeng and Meishan several days ago to search for the late Clan Leader Jiang's children and the head disciple,”

“I did,” Lan Wangji confirmed.

“Huh?”

“You…” Jiang Wanyin and Wei Wuxian trailed off, their gazes fixed on the seemingly impassive Lan Wangji, their surprise evident.

Wei Wuxian was aware that his husband was among those who had embarked on the search, but hearing it stated caused his heart to skip a beat. All these years, he had mistakenly believed that Lan Wangji did not care.

Oh, how wrong he was.

“Aw, Wangji-xiong, you do care!” Nie Huaisang chimed in, his voice serving as a means to alleviate the heavy tension that permeated the room.

“Thank you, Lan Wangji,” Jiang Yanli and Jiang Fengmian whispered, bowing in gratitude.

Lan Wangji reciprocated their gesture with a bow of his own.

“Then why do you have to risk getting yourself into trouble by helping the Jiang Clan?” The elder asked, but then he continued, “Wangji, this time, Qishan Wen Clan took brutal measures to exterminate Yunmeng Jiang Clan overnight. The reason that Qishan Wen Clan put on a massive show of force is to assert its indisputable position as the head of the cultivation world. Those who comply will thrive and those who defy will perish.”

Madam Jin's expression hardened at the elder's words. This proved to be true, given that Jin Guangshan was one of the leaders who refused to fight against the Wen Clan. He is indeed a dog running away with his tail in between his legs.

The elder then continued, “The other cultivation clans have kept their distances so far. Gusu Lan Clan having already taken a serious blow, should in particular keep a low profile and rebuild our strength.”

Lan Wangji then responded, “Cultivation clans are interdependent. If one falls, the others will be in danger. It’s especially in such a time that we should unite and resist.”

“Amidst the current circumstances, it is solely he who contemplates the notion of clans joining forces to fight against the Qishan Wen Clan,” Song Lan’s gaze then shifted towards Lan Wangji as he conveyed this thought. “But even with the unity of clans, such efforts would prove futile without a formidable army and force to withstand the might of the Wen Clan.”

Xiao Xingchen concurred with Song Lan's perspective, “I agree. However, having such a mindset like that would act as a catalyst for transformative change.”

“Mn.”

“Resist?” The elder repeated. “The Qishan Wen Clan's dominance is undeniable, making it a formidable force to reckon with.” He turned, facing away. “Whoever takes the lead will bear the brunt of Wen Ruohan’s retribution.”

“Well, he died in the end, so what retribution is he talking about?” Nie Mingjue retorted.

Nie Huaisang shuddered, “That’s a reckless thing to say, Da-ge. Wen Ruohan would’ve been pissed hearing that.”

“The Cloud Recesses stands as a testament to the dedication of our ancestors across generations. How could we allow it to fall under our watch?”

After reflecting on the elder's words, Lan Wangji met his gaze and asserted, “In times of crisis, no one emerges unscathed. Someone has to take the lead.”

“See? Even a child like him possesses a greater amount of courage than the majority of cultivators,” An unknown cultivator commented.

“However, he is still naive when it comes to matters about the cultivation world. Furthermore, he spoke of uniting the clans in order to combat the Wens as if it were a simple task—”

Then, the unidentified cultivator's voice wavered, a tinge of embarrassment staining his cheeks, as Lan Xichen's words sliced through the conversation with the precision of a blade through delicate silk, “I believe Wangji possesses a greater understanding than you initially

presumed. He has faced hardships during his formative years. I believe this alone speaks volumes about the character of my esteemed brother.”

Lan Xichen's calm demeanor belied the intensity of his conviction, his unwavering support for his brother evident in every word he spoke.

The unknown cultivator glanced at the brothers and cleared his throat awkwardly as he recalled a few memories from earlier and quietly responded, “Ah, well, I suppose I may have underestimated Wangji's experiences. My apologies for any offense caused.”

Lan Xichen then replied, his tone now softened yet still carrying a hint of frostiness, “Apologies are unnecessary, but it is important to recognize the depth of Wangji's character. Though he may appear reserved, beneath that exterior lies a heart as resolute as the steadfast mountains themselves.”

The unidentified cultivator nodded in understanding, humbled by Lan Xichen's gentle admonishment.

"Brother," Lan Wangji called out, though feeling somewhat flustered that his elder brother had once again come to his defense. “You need not do this.”

"Why not?" Lan Xichen inquired. “Witnessing your unwavering determination before me, I cannot help but feel a sense of pride. No one should mistakenly assume that determination equates to naivety.”

The unknown cultivator recoiled at the remark.

“Oh, A-Huan,” Madam Lan uttered softly as she gently squeezed his cheeks. “You really are a good son.”

“Eh?”

The elder sighed once again, “You are such a stubborn child!”

However, simultaneously, an individual was approaching the duo.

As soon as the elder noticed his presence, he immediately eased up and addressed him, "Ah, Qiren. Your arrival couldn't have been more timely. Come, talk some sense into Wangji.”

“Shufu,” Lan Qiren greeted, offering a respectful salute. “I believe that Wangji had said nothing wrong.”

Intrigued, Qingheng-jun mumbled a small, “Oh?”

“You!”

“As Wangji said, in times of crisis, no one emerges unscathed. In this great calamity, all cultivation clans should join forces and over the hard times together. I will set out for Qinghe tomorrow.”

"What is the matter?" Lan Qiren inquired, noticing his elder brother's gaze. The sight irked him. He could discern mischievousness lurking within those eyes.

“I simply assumed you would object to Wangji's proposition," he remarked, a smile tugging at his lips. "I suppose righteousness proves to be quite advantageous in the future.”

Lan Qiren clenched his jaw and glared at Qingheng-jun, who now found amusement in the situation along with his wife.

How delightful it was to witness Lan Qiren in such a state.

Oh, how Lan Qiren yearned to silence that mouth of his...

“...Unbelievable,” grumbled the elder, walking away without acknowledging the respectful bow Wangji directed towards him.

Without glancing back at his nephew, Lan Qiren proceeded to explain, "Your great uncle is simply concerned about the preservation and security of our clan's legacy."

“I understand.”

“Do you have any news about Xichen?” Lan Qiren asked

The current Lan Xichen and everyone else present tensed up at the mention of Xichen. It had been quite some time since he had gone missing.

“I hope you managed to remain safe during your escape,” Madam Lan softly expressed, her tone infused with worry.

“Yes, A-Niang," Lan Xichen responded with a smile. A bitter smile when he was reminded of someone.”I was indeed safe.”

Lan Wangji could only solemnly shake his head. No one knew where Lan Xichen was. He was starting to get worried.

“...No news is good news,” Lan Qiren decided. “Xichen is smart. He will definitely avert perils. How about Sect Leader Jiang’s children?”

“Our people saved Jiang Yanli somewhere near Zizhou. To avoid jeopardizing Meishan Yu Clan, we’ve temporarily escorted her to the east.”

Jiang Yanli looked at Lan Wangji with gratitude in her eyes.

Meanwhile, Jin Zixuan and Jiang Wanyin expressed their thanks, “We appreciate your help.”

Lan Wangji nodded in acknowledgment.

“….. Wei Ying and Young Master Jiang are still missing.”

Everything faded to black.

“It’s fine,” Cangse Sanren whispered as if she was convincing herself. “It’s going to be. They’re going to be okay.”

Wei Changze held his wife tightly, seeking solace in their embrace, and cast a glance at their son. “Indeed, they will,” he affirmed.

However, deep down, even he struggled to believe those words.

Suddenly, amidst the sound of rain pouring relentlessly, a loud thud shattered the momentary silence.

A bag filled with buns crashed abruptly onto the ground.

Wei Wuxian stood frozen, aghast, his gaze fixed upon the empty alleyway. Jiang Cheng was still gone.

Yu Ziyuan, Jiang Fengmian, and Jiang Yanli felt their anxiety intensify, their hearts pounding so loudly that they involuntarily clenched their fists.

'If only Wei Wuxian—!' Yu Ziyuan screamed in her mind. She wanted to seize the boy and unleash a torrent of anger for abandoning Jiang Cheng. However, the harsh reality loomed before them—if they were to venture out together, their capture would be inevitable. Moreover, their relentless flee had left them famished, a fact that Yu Ziyuan acknowledged. She comprehended the necessity of sustenance to endure their arduous journey, placing the responsibility of procuring food upon Wei Wuxian. Yet, amidst this understanding, a profound frustration gnawed at her core. How could Wei Wuxian leave Jiang Cheng behind, especially when he was in such a fragile state of mind?

Wei Wuxian's frantic search intensified as his anxiety grew with each passing moment. His breath quickened, his eyes widened, and his heart raced.

"Jiang Cheng?" he called out, desperately scanning his surroundings.

Silence.

Mianmian sensed Wei Wuxian's distress and felt a heavy weight settle in her chest, reminiscent of the fear she felt when her child went missing in the forest.

The thought of Jiang Wanyin being captured by the Wen Clan sent a chill down her spine.

Without hesitation, Wei Wuxian dashed back into the deserted street he had just left. Despite being gone for a short time, Jiang Cheng was nowhere to be seen. Wei Wuxian searched tirelessly, but his heir was nowhere to be found.

"Jiang Cheng!" he shouted, panic sinking in.

Witnessing the distress gradually overtaking Wei Wuxian's face, Jiang Wanyin was suddenly consumed by a creeping sense of remorse. Despite this, he did not regret what he did that day.

Observing his brother's distress, albeit somewhat subdued, only exacerbated his inner turmoil. He wanted to express his regret for causing such worry, yet found himself unable to muster the courage to do so.

'Fuck, am I still a coward, even in this moment?'

As the deserted streets bore witness to his turmoil, Wei Wuxian retraced his steps to their initial meeting point. His hat was lost in the chaos, he stood there with rain-soaked hair and a look of sheer horror etched on his face.

He looked pitiful.

Lan Wangji tightened his embrace around Wei Wuxian when he sensed the faintest quiver in his frame. His husband was overwhelmed by a sense of dread for his brother, and Lan Wangji wished he could hide him at this moment.

"Wei Ying, don't look."

"Hmm?" Wei Wuxian questioned, his attention abruptly brought back to the present, and looked at Lan Wangji. "Lan Zhan, even if I avert my gaze, I can still hear."

Should he just silence the scene? But silencing spells only prove effective against cultivators.

"It's not that I'm afraid," Wei Wuxian responded with a solemn tone. "Well, yes, I am scared for Jiang Cheng's safety, but there is something else that instills a greater fear within me."

"What is it—" Lan Wangji began, but his words were cut short when he saw the sorrowful, bitter smile etched upon his husband's face, instantly comprehending the underlying meaning, causing his expression to transform into one of horror.

'No…'

While searching, Wei Wuxian turned left, then right, then left again, followed by right, and even spun around in a complete circle, yet he failed to discern anything and remained utterly clueless about what course of action to pursue.

“Jiang Cheng,” he whispered once more, his voice filled with helplessness.

‘Fuck, it.’ Jiang Wanyin turned to Wei Wuxian with a remorseful expression and muttered, “I’m sorry.”

Wei Wuxian simply exhaled and replied, “No need to apologize, Jiang Cheng. I get why you did that.”

“Still—”

“We both did what we could,” Wei Wuxian continued, cutting off Jiang Wanyin. “It’s best to just move on.”

As Wei Wuxian appeared distressed, a stall worker inquired, “Are you searching for the young man who was here earlier?”

Wei Wuxian hurriedly approached the stall worker and inquired, “Yes, have you seen him? Where did he go?”

The stall worker explained, “I didn't notice, but he seemed lost in thought and observing people earlier. When I looked again, he was gone. Perhaps he left?”

“He left?” Wei Wuxian breathed out.

Despite the admiration for Jiang Wanyin's courage, the cultivators couldn't help but feel frustrated at the distress caused to Wei Wuxian. While Jiang Wanyin's recent loss may have clouded his mind, his actions were impulsive and inconsiderate of Wei Wuxian's emotions.

Cangse Sanren sensed her son's intentions, she whispered, “Don’t go back.” However, even in such circumstances, what can she even do when her son on the screen remains oblivious to her warning?

“...He left...He left…” Wei Wuxian repeated, dazedly, then straightened. “Lotus Pier!”

Jiang Fengmian's hands tightened into fists. Wei Wuxian's astute understanding of his son's character was unsettling, but there was something even more disconcerting.

The fact that the siblings had just managed to escape to Lotus Pier only to return mere hours later was frightening. It was only a matter of time before the Wen Clan surrounded the Lotus Pier, and the siblings' presence in such a dangerous vicinity increased the risk of their capture. Jiang Fengmian felt an overwhelming urge to intervene, to step into the scene and whisk them away from harm's reach.

And Jiang Fengmian wasn’t wrong. In the subsequent scene, the sun had set, the rain continued to pour relentlessly, and the port was teeming with numerous Wen ships. The walls were adorned with the flags of the Qishan Wen Sect, leaving no trace of the once-proud Yunmeng flags that had either been torn down or consumed by the fires of destruction.

Pain etched across the faces of the Jiang family, particularly Jin Ling, as they beheld the devastation that had befallen their once beautiful home. Yet, Jin Ling held onto hope, believing that his Jiujiu would rebuild Yunmeng and restore its former glory and power.

“How long did it take you to rebuild everything, Jiujiu?” Jin Ling asked, his voice gentle yet cautious.

“A very long time,” Jiang Wanyin replied, and Jin Ling refrained from probing further. From that simple response, he could discern the immense hardships his uncle had endured. He

wondered about the weight that had burdened his young shoulders as a leader and the sorrow he carried for the loss of his parents.

Even as a young leader of Lanling Jin, he lacked experience. However, his dedication to his sect compelled him to assume the role. On the other hand, his uncle, burdened with the sorrow of losing his parents and lacking any support (since Wei Wuxian turned into a demonic cultivator and his mother sacrificed herself for him), questioned the source of his sanity to this day.

He's just grateful that he's got his Jiujiu by his side to offer guidance. He is determined to reciprocate the support and help this time.

Wei Wuxian continued to run tirelessly, his breath fading away with each step. If he were to stop now, the chances of finding Jiang Cheng would diminish greatly.

However, as panic consumed him, weakness and dizziness overcame him. Eventually, his legs gave way, and he collapsed onto the ground.

"Wei Ying!" Wei Changze exclaimed, instinctively moving towards his son. He was about to catch him before he fell!

As he collapsed, his face plummeted into the dirt. He could taste the soil in his mouth, and an overwhelming mixture of hatred and helplessness rose from his chest.

'What right do I have to be weak right now?! Why am I so weak?!'

The cultivators did not know what to do; the fact that they understood Wei Wuxian's helplessness right now did not sit well with them.

They harbored both resentment and anger towards Wei Wuxian for becoming what he was in the past and until now. And yet, they found themselves wanting to help him.

“Senior Wei,” Jingyi and Zizhen muttered, their fists clenched in frustration.

‘Get up, Wei-xiong!’ Nie Huaisang's internal cry reverberated as he restrained the tears welling in his eyes, witnessing the torment of his friend. ‘You’re not weak! I know you can do this!’

‘Fuck, I don’t have time for this. I need to save Jiang Cheng!’

“Yes!”

“You can do this, Wei Wuxian!”

He then slammed his fists so hard onto the ground and screamed before he finally crawled up and continued to run.

“Go, Senior Wei!”

Yu Ziyuan observed the unfolding events with a stoic expression. Did a flicker of compassion just surface within her upon witnessing Wei Wuxian's struggle? Had she truly lost it? When did her concern for Wei Wuxian begin to manifest?

‘No matter,’ she thought*, ‘as long as he’ll rescue A-Cheng’*

Wei Wuxian, now standing with hands on his knees, gasped for air behind a concealed wall. The taste of blood lingered in his mouth.

“I wish I could offer him some water,” Zizhen remarked, his heart aching for his senior Wei.

After regaining control of his breathing, Wei Wuxian stealthily made his way back into Lotus Pier, evading detection.

In Wei Wuxian's head, a voice prayed with a desperation akin to despair:

'Please, just please!'* he thought. *'Please don't let anyone be talking about Jiang Cheng. Please don't have anyone laughing about his corpse resting in the training field. Or else, or else I'll…."

Or else?

Even if it was true, what could he do?

In this predicament, what can a kid like him do now in this situation? Nothing! This exacerbates the frustration, for Wei Wuxian finds himself utterly devoid of any means to safeguard his own well-being. Even if he were to stumble upon a solution, would it prove sufficient? No, of course not! Given the multitude of Wens converging upon this vicinity, he is merely courting his own death.

Indeed, a lamb among wolves.

Once more, despair crept in. The Jiangs were gone; he lacked resources, a weapon, and allies. He stood alone. Hopeless and powerless.

For the first time, Wei Wuxian realized his own insignificance.

And maybe now they understood why he delved into demonic cultivation, because truly, if he resorted to it now, they would stand by him. He could raze at Lotus Pier right now and kill those Wens for all they care; they'll support him.

And just with this, they knew that their perception of Wei Wuxian began to crumble as they continued to watch his memories.

Fuck, the disapproval towards the practice of demonic cultivation was undeniable. Nevertheless, it was the only option Wei Wuxian could go for.

“Did you—”

“No,” Wei Wuxian interrupted his mother. “Not yet at least.”

“Not yet?” Wei Changze repeated, his confusion evident.

“It was after this that I practiced it,” Wei Wuxian clarified.

Wei Changze and Cangse Sanren couldn't help but feel a growing unease.

To stealthily navigate through the open area, Wei Wuxian silently plunged into the water. Within moments, two Wen soldiers strolled past a nearby walkway, engaged in casual conversation.

“I heard that Jiang Cheng was caught,” one said.

“What?!” Yu Ziyuan exclaimed. In an instant, any trace of compassion she had felt earlier vanished, replaced by a surge of anger toward Wei Wuxian. Who the hell cares about Wei Wuxian, Jiang Cheng was captured!

“You!” Yu Ziyuan hissed, turning towards Wei Wuxian. However, Madam Jin swiftly grabbed her wrists and pulled her away from the boy.

“Don’t blame him on this, it was not his fault,” she stated matter-of-factly, and everyone present agreed with her.

Cangse Sanren and Wei Changze were grateful for Madam Jin's intervention.

“Yeah,” the other Wen disciple responded. “Instead of hiding well, he delivered himself right into our hands. Wen-er-gongzi ordered us to lock him up in the woodshed and guard him closely.”

The pair turned the corner, disappearing from sight, while Wei Wuxian silently retreated back underwater.

‘Good,’ Yu Ziyuan thought to herself.

Outside the central woodshed, two Wen disciples stood guard in front of the door. Despite their assigned duty to prevent Jiang Cheng's escape, they appeared rather bored instead of vigilant.

One sighed, “Does someone on the verge of death really need to be watched so closely?”

“What?” Jiang Yanli whispered in confusion, her hands tightening into fists as a sense of unease began to settle within her.

“You fucking Wen-dogs!” Yu Ziyuan shouted, and the Wen siblings, who had been silently observing the memory unfold, flinched at her outburst

Sighing once more, the disciple turned away from his companion to stretch his hips and grumble, “My waist hurts.”

His companion was gone.

All of the cultivators' eyes widened in shock. In a split second, Wei Wuxian had lunged forward, covered the disciple's mouth, and whisked him away. With no sounds of resistance, it was clear that the Wen disciple had been eliminated.

And yet, not a single one of them heard Wei Wuxian make a move.

"Truly a master of stealth," Jin Zixuan remarked, his voice tinged with amazement.

Mianmian chuckled, "That's Wei Wuxian for you."

Simultaneously, all the disciples grinned and cheered, "That was awesome, Senior Wei!"

"How is he so good?!"

"I did not hear anything! I would've assumed a wind blew him away at first!"

Wei Wuxian only smiled at their chatters.

Laughing once, the first disciple turned fully and suggested, "Let's sneak out to drink __"

Wei Wuxian leaped forward and snapped his neck.

All of the disciples were taken aback by Wei Wuxian's sudden change in demeanor. His swift and decisive actions left them in a state of shock, despite their combat training. The sight of their senior wei displaying such brutality was unexpected, to say the least.

The adults, however, remained unfazed by the situation. Even Nie Mingjue could snap someone's neck with his bare hands with ease. But then again, witnessing Wei Wuxian's ruthless side was a spectacle in itself, especially considering his young age.

Wei Wuxian swung the doors wide, rushing to the side of a figure sprawled on the floor.

"Jiang Cheng!" he hissed frantically. "Jiang Cheng!"

The Jiang heir was drenched in blood, lying still with a pallid complexion that resembled death itself.

When Jiang Wanyin stared at his other self, he swiftly averted his gaze from the screen. Witnessing his younger self in such a state was undeniably distressing and degrading.

Jiang Cheng's thin neck lay exposed, and Wei Wuxian immediately checked for a pulse.

The cultivators held their breath, waiting for a sign of life.

There's a pulse.

At once, there was a collective sigh of relief filled the air.

And Wei Wuxian felt the same way.

Yu Ziyuan, who was on the verge of anger, was forced to reconsider her reaction upon seeing that her son was now fine, but she gritted her teeth and sternly commanded, "Now get away from there!"

"What happened here?!" someone shouted from outside.

“What the—they found them already?!” A-Qing exclaimed.

“Run, Senior Wei!” Sizhui begged.

“Someone got hurt,” another disciple remarked. Wei Wuxian gritted his teeth, swiftly lifted Jiang Cheng, and sprinted away.

“Go!” Madam Lan urged, her voice tinged with concern.

“Hurry!” Jiang Yanli pleaded.

“Wei Wuxian is still injured,” Lan Xichen stated gravely. “It’s going to be very hard for him to move around while carrying Jiang Wanyin.”

Upon hearing Lan Xichen's words, Qingheng-jun and Lan Qiren suddenly recalled the brutal whipping Wei Wuxian had endured with Zidian before the attack.

Madam Lan then remarked, “His back will be agitated.”

Lan Qiren interjected, “It is more efficient for Wei Wuxian to carry him on his back rather than on the front. He will have to endure the pain.”

“Somebody! Hurry up!” The Wens urgently cried out. Meanwhile, Wei Wuxian swiftly traversed the rooftops, displaying an astonishing degree of agility considering the condition of his physical form. In hot pursuit, the Wens relentlessly pursued him.

“It’s Wei Wuxian!” someone realized.

“Come on! Don’t let him get away.”

Wei Wuxian dashed across the rooftops, burdened by the weight of Jiang Wanyin in his arms, rendering his chances of eluding his relentless pursuers futile. The Wens, mounted on their swords, soared through the air in pursuit of the Jiang brothers, gradually closing in on them with each passing moment.

To the dismay and disgust of Wen Ning and Wen Qing, they recognized some of the individuals chasing after Wei Wuxian, leaving them with an overwhelming desire to intervene and prevent their relentless pursuit.

The Wens drew nearer, closing the distance to a mere ten meters, then five, and finally two. An archer skillfully drew back the bowstring, aiming at Wei Wuxian's feet.

In an instant, arrows were unleashed.

“No!”

“Watch out!”

Dodging swiftly, Wei Wuxian lost his balance, causing his grip on his charge to weaken.

Jiang Cheng plummeted downwards.

“A-Cheng!” Jiang Yanli and Jiang Fengmian cried out, while Yu Ziyuan restrained herself from doing the same.

Leaping off the rooftop, Wei Wuxian swiftly enveloped Jiang Cheng in his arms, deftly maneuvering so that Jiang Cheng ended up on top and he on the bottom.

They collided forcefully with the unforgiving ground.

The cultivators and disciples let out horrified screams…

“A-Ying!”

“Wei Ying!”

“Wei Wuxian!”

“Senior Wei!”

In that moment, Wei Wuxian merely winced, as if he could feel the excruciating pain coursing through his back.

Wei Wuxian let out a piercing scream, desperately gasping for air that had been forcefully expelled from his lungs. It was no surprise, considering the impact his back had just endured from the collision with the ground.

Yu Ziyuan glared at the screen. Any inkling of guilt she had felt earlier paled in comparison to the overwhelming remorse that now consumed her.

Cangse Sanren and Wei Changze quivered in terror as the sickening thud of Wei Wuxian hitting the ground echoed around them. The memory of that sound would haunt them for the remainder of their lives.

‘Please,’ Wei Changze silently begged, *‘someone help my son.’*

“Over there!” A voice cried out.

Wei Wuxian, despite his injury, pushed through the pain to rise to his feet, Jiang Cheng on his back. His breaths were ragged, his body trembling, but he searched frantically for an escape route.

Nie Mingjue could empathize with the desperation Wei Wuxian felt in protecting his brother. It was almost as if he saw a reflection of himself in the boy. While his admiration for Wei Wuxian grew, his disdain for his cultivation method remained unwavering.

Furthermore, Even Lan Qiren and Qingheng-jun couldn't help but be impressed by Wei Wuxian's unwavering determination and endurance. Yet, the fact that he was just a young boy enduring such suffering without a moment's respite was endlessly frustrating.

Sizhui whispered in awe, “Senior Wei truly is remarkable.”

Jingyi smiled and nodded, “Yeah, he is.”

“Let’s move!” the Wens shouted.

“Get them!”

“Don’t let them run away!”

Wei Wuxian sprinted, yet quickly realized there was no escape. Surveying his surroundings in despair, he could only edge closer to the wall as the Wens’ voices drew nearer. His back met the door behind him.

It swung open.

Wen Ning’s eyes widened with a smile.

This was it…

He was dragged inside.

“Woah, what?!”

“Wei Wuxian!!”

“Isn’t this the moment when,” Wen Qing inquired of his younger brother, who simply nodded.

“Yes, jiejie.”

In an instant, Wei Wuxian seized Wen by the throat and forcefully pinned him against the wall.

“Stay silent!” Wei Wuxian snarled. “Or I will snap your neck.”

“Hey,” Zizhen began. “Isn’t that—”

“Ghost General?!”

“Wen Ning?!”

“Oh thank god,” Sizhui breathed a sigh of relief. This means that the brothers are safe for now. He felt thankful that his uncle was able to save them.

“Why must every Jiang resort to threatening to break something of someone's?” A Jin disciple inquired, as he had been observing this pattern for quite some time. “Can't they simply mention skinning them alive or something? Just for a change.”

A Nie disciple gazed at the Jin disciple in disbelief and remarked, “You’re scary, man.”

“Did you find him?” A voice called from outside, causing Wei Wuxian's expression to shift from fierce to fearful in an instant. He glanced around, realizing his surroundings.

This was his room.

“What a coincidence,” Jin Zixuan remarked.

“Did you see him?!”

Wei Wuxian shifted his attention towards the doors, where the figures of the Wen Disciples stood.

“I haven’t seen him,” came a response from outside.

“He must be somewhere nearby,” the first said. “Keep searching.”

The shadows departed, and Wei Wuxian let out a trembling breath, feeling a slight twinge of pain. Jiang Cheng continued to sleep uneasily on his back, the weight of the other boy pressing down on him like a heavy burden, cutting through his flesh like a sharp blade.

Yu Ziyuan clenched her jaw. It was always about the back. Why did he keep mentioning his back? Yes, he had been injured and his back had hit the ground hard, but he had endured the

pain remarkably well despite carrying A-Cheng on his back.

Yet, she couldn't help but feel a growing sense of regret creeping in.

'No,' she silently admonished herself. *'This is not right. I should focus on A-Cheng instead of succumbing to this newfound remorse.'*

A moment later, following the departure of the Wen disciples, Wen Ning spoke up, "Wei… Wei-gongzi. I'm here to help you."

"Help him?" An unknown cultivator asked. "Are you sure about that?"

"Yeah," one butted in and stared at Wen Ning.

Observing this, Wen Qing glared at the man and positioned herself in front of her younger brother.

"Remember, you are still a member of the Wen clan. Who knows—"

"One should refrain from making assumptions or drawing conclusions without concrete evidence or witnesses," Sizhui warned the men solemnly.

"Your actions are provoking Sizhui," Jin Ling smirked. "That's so bad."

"Young man," Xiao Xingcheng intervened, continuing, "It would be prudent for us to heed the advice of the Lan disciple, don't you agree? They're listening you know?"

The atmosphere grew tense. The two unfamiliar cultivators slowly shifted their gaze towards the Lans, only to be met with their cold stare. Feeling uneasy, they quickly averted their eyes,

especially since Wei Wuxian was also glaring at them as if poised to strike at any given moment.

Wei Wuxian's expression was a mix of anger and suspicion as he questioned. “To help me? You Wens! What’s’ your intention?”

In a state of shock, Wen Ning inquired, “You… you don’t remember me?”

“He never remembers anyone,” Jiang Wanyin interjected, prompting a slight smile from Wei Wuxian.

“Qishan,” Wen Ning hesitated, his voice trembling. “Discussion Conference… My archery…”

“Qi—Qishan Wen Clan, Wen Ning. Courtesy name is Qionglin.”

“You’re that Wen… Wen-something… the one who was quite good at archery?”

Wen Ning's face lit up, “Yes! It’s me! Don’t worry Master Wei, I won’t harm you! I can get Jiang-gongzi to somewhere safe!” he declared.

Some of the cultivators found themselves in a state of inner conflict. They were a Wen. Wen Ning, a fellow Wen, displayed unwavering support for Wei Wuxian, despite the potential risks involved. While Wei Wuxian had helped Wen Ning with his archery skills and defended him from Wen Chao, these acts alone did not seem sufficient to warrant such loyalty and selflessness. Nevertheless, Wen Ning appeared to hold dear the moment when Wei Wuxian came to his aid and was prepared to go to great lengths to repay the kindness.

This was precisely what people meant when they referred to Wen Ning as the most devoted soldier in Wei Wuxian’s army.

“What?” Wei Wuxian questioned, his expression filled with doubt.

“Eh? W-Well, I am also a part of the Wen Clan. I have a group of disciples who faithfully follow my commands.”

“Follow your orders to kill people?”

“Qing-jiejie—”

“Don’t talk Wei Wuxian,” Wen Qing interrupts him and continued, “Your assumptions have merit.”

Wei Wuxian pouted, “But—”

“Are you talking back to me now?”

“Nope!” Wei Wuxian promptly responded. “You never heard me!”

“N-No!” Wen Ning rushed to say. “My disciples do not randomly kill people! I have not harmed any of the Jiang Sect's disciples either! I only rushed here upon hearing about the incident at Lotus Pier. It's the truth!”

Wei Wuxian continued to glare, his gaze reminiscent of the Yiling Patriarch, the man who defeated numerous cultivators with his army.

This sent shivers down the spines of the cultivators.

“You’re really scary, Wei-xiong,” Nie Huaisang mumbled.

After a moment of contemplation, Wei Wuxian slowly released his grip on Wen Ning's neck. He dropped his and asked, "Then… could you… could you help me…."

Lan Wangji frowned. He wished he was here at this moment so he could help him in whatever way he could.

"Could you help me in retrieving the remains of Sect Leader Jiang and Madam Yu?"

Both the Jiang Patriarch and Matriarch widened their eyes in disbelief. Since their deaths, their sole focus had been the safety of their beloved children.

But for Wei Wuxian to think of that as a priority when he should've prioritized their safety over everything else…

Madam Jin discreetly glanced at Yu Ziyuan and observed the conflicted expression on her face. She pondered silently, *'What thoughts are running through your mind now, Ziyuan? Wei Wuxian genuinely cares for you, and you are witnessing it firsthand. What are you going to do now?'*

And just as anticipated by Madam Jin, Yu Ziyuan glared at Wei Wuxian and questioned, "Wei Wuxian, what is the meaning of this?"

Knowing that they both already knew the answer, Wei Wuxian remained silent and turned away. However, Yu Ziyuan desired to hear it directly from him.

"You really dared to ask a Wen to retrieve our bodies?!" Yu Ziyuan snapped. "Instead of concerning yourself with A-Cheng, you should leave us alone! It is already repulsive enough to die at the hands of the Wens! What do you gain from retrieving our bodies, huh?!"

“A proper rest!” Wei Wuxian exclaimed, causing the room to fall into silence. “I am willing to kneel before a Wen if it means retrieving your bodies or your belongings. It is the least I can do for both of you and for Jiang Cheng, to provide him with some mementos.”

Jiang Wanyin widened his eyes in disbelief, turning to his brother with a mixture of emotions on his face.

Yu Ziyuan's anger flared, her eyes flashing with disbelief and contempt. “A proper rest? Do you think we care about your pity now? You, who brought calamity upon our sect, who tarnished our reputation, dare to speak of a proper rest?!” Her voice dripped with venom, her disdain palpable.

Jiang Fengmian tightened his grip on her wrist, his expression reflecting sorrow and resignation. “Ziyuan, please, calm yourself. This is not the time for anger.”

But Yu Ziyuan would not be placated, “How dare you speak to me of calmness, Fengmian? Do you not see what he has done? He seeks to manipulate us even in death, to assuage his guilt with empty gestures.”

“Do not speak of my son in such a manner, Yu-furen,” Wei Changze glowered. “He is already doing everything he can to—”

Wei Wuxian interrupted his father and locked eyes with Yu Ziyuan, his gaze unwavering and his voice steady, “It was my fault, and I do not seek forgiveness or absolution. I only seek to right the wrongs I have wrought to the best of my ability. If you refuse, then so be it. But know that Jiang Cheng deserves something to hold on to from the both of you, and I will do whatever it takes to provide it.”

There was a tense silence in the room, broken only by the sound of the cultivators whispering their thoughts and opinions. Yu Ziyuan's eyes bore into Wei Wuxian with a mixture of loathing and confusion. She scoffed and turned her attention back to the screen.

Jiang Yanli, who had overheard the entire conversation, wore a gentle smile as she clasped Wei Wuxian's hand and expressed her gratitude, saying, “Thank you, A-Xian.”

Wei Wuxian's smile turned bitter as he replied, “No need for thanks, Shijie.”

With unwavering determination, Wen Ning affirmed, “I will do my utmost best.”

Nie Mingjue let out a weary sigh and rubbed his temples, murmuring, “More and more betrayal.”

Had Wen Ruohan discovered this, Wen Ning would have already faced dire consequences.

As the conversation unfolded, Wen Ning had already made his escape. The scene transitioned, revealing Wen Ning's return accompanied by a group of devoted disciples.

Wei Wuxian arched an eyebrow. “And where is this supposed *‘safe-haven’* of yours?”

Wen Ning piped up, “Come this way, Wei-gongzi! I have a ship!”

Wei Wuxian's skeptical gaze tracked his movements closely.

“I mean, it's only natural for him to be cautious in such a situation,” An unknown cultivator mumbled.

“Given the circumstances, his reaction is quite justified,” another one said, observing Wei Wuxian's expression. “He is, after all, surrounded by the Wens, and Wen Ning himself is a member of that clan.”

Carrying Jiang Wanyin, Wei Wuxian followed Wen Ning to a hidden, remaining vigilant for any potential dangers. Once Jiang Cheng was settled, Wen Ning tended to his injuries with care.

Jiang Wanyin harbored a deep-seated animosity towards Wen Ning, but witnessing his efforts stirred conflicting emotions within him. Despite his reluctance to admit it, Jiang Wanyin felt a twinge of gratitude towards Wen Ning for his help. Perhaps he'll express his thanks in private, and speak with Wen Qing at a later time.

Glancing in Wen Qing's direction, Jiang Wanyin found her scrutinizing him intently, causing a slight blush to creep up his cheeks. Suppressing his embarrassment, he nodded at her, silently conveying his appreciation, to which Wen Qing responded with a casual nod of her own.

Upon reaching the shore, the boat docked, at Yiling. The trio proceeded with caution, making their way to a grand and exquisite residence. Stealthily, they entered through a discreet back entrance and ventured into a smaller building.

Mianmian's brows furrowed as she inquired, "The safe haven is there? At Yiling?"

"That's where I am," Wen Qing responded.

"Oh."

Wen Ning quietly closed the door behind them.

In the blink of an eye, Wei Wuxian seized Wen Ning by the neck once more, his voice filled with a menacing hiss, "Tell me, where exactly are we?"

Raising his hands in a gesture of surrender, Wen Ning hastily refuted, "I-no, I haven't…."

"What do you mean by 'haven't'?" Wei Wuxian demanded. "Is this not the Yiling Supervisory Office? Whose unfortunate territory have you brought us to this time?

What is your intention in leading us here?"

"Ah," Nie Huaisang suddenly understood, a smile gracing his lips. "Now I get it."

"What did you get?" Nie Mingjue asked.

"I'm sure it will be explained in the memory."

"I-I assure you, Young Master Wei, that I have no ill intentions towards you," Wen Ning pleaded, his voice filled with sincerity. "I-If I had wanted to harm you, I could have simply reported that I saw you! I wouldn't have led you all the way here!"

Despite the rather persuasive argument put forth by Wen Ning, Wei Wuxian maintained a state of heightened vigilance, prepared to explode at any moment.

"T-This is a Supervisory Office," Wen Ning reminded. "If there's a place where the Wen Sect would least likely search for you, it'd be here. As long as you remain hidden here, you two can safely stay here."

"I understand now," Lan Xichen murmured, his voice barely audible. The presence of Wen Qing in the office provided an added layer of protection. It was a calculated move, one that he quickly grasped.

Lan Wangji, ever the stoic figure, stood silently beside his brother, his unreadable expression giving away a hint of approval. He turned to Wen Ning, a silent gesture of gratitude, which Wen Ning reciprocated with a warm smile and a nod.

"But still, wouldn't it be dangerous if Wen Chao were to barge in at any moment?" Jingyi, however, couldn't help but voice his concern. "Considering his authority, he can do whatever he wants."

Wen Qing, undeterred by the intimidating stares of the cultivators, responded confidently, “My jurisdiction extends to Yiling. Even if Wen Chao holds a higher position, he cannot easily interfere with me. I am not one to be easily swayed.”

On the other hand, Nie Mingjue’s emotions began to tumble like boulders rolling down a mountain as he continued to listen.

Why was a Wen doing this?

Wei Wuxian had unblinkingly stared at Wen Ning for several excruciatingly long seconds, trying to get a feel for the boy’s trustworthiness. He watched and watched as Wen Ning began fidgeting under his gaze.

Then, finally, he whispered a low, “Thank you” and “Sorry.”

He carefully laid Jiang Wanyin on the bed before them.

Cangse Sanren's heart ached as she watched her son, Wei Wuxian, bear the weight of their burdens with such visible exhaustion. She wanted to see him rest, to find solace in her embrace and regain his strength. Yet, she knew the harsh reality they faced, with Jiang Wanyin in such a vulnerable state and their precarious situation demanding Wei Wuxian's unwavering support.

Her maternal instincts surged within her, a fierce desire to shield her son from the rest of the world. But she also understood the strength and resilience that resided within him, the same resilience that had carried him through countless trials before.

With a heavy heart, Cangse Sanren reached out to gently brush a stray lock of hair from Wei Wuxian's face. “A-Ying,” she whispered softly, her voice tinged with both love and sorrow. “When the burdens become too heavy, remember to rest and seek solace in the company of others. You do not have to face this alone.”

Wei Wuxian responded with a gentle smile, leaning into his mother's touch. “I understand, mother. I will.”

Once Jiang Wanyin had been set down, Wei Wuxian's gaze shifted back to Wen Ning, observing with caution. Despite the fragile truce between them, an underlying tension lingered. Wei Wuxian remained vigilant, prepared to react swiftly to any potential threat.

The doors slammed open.

“What?!”

“No!”

The wind rushed inside as Wen Qing walked through the door.

Zizhen, visibly pale, voiced his concerns, “Nothing’s going to happen, right?”

Sizhui, mirroring his worry, sought reassurance from his aunt through his eyes.

“Nothing happened,” she clarified, causing a collective sigh of relief to fill the room.

Wen Ning's startled reaction prompted Wei Wuxian to rise, ready to confront the danger. His attention flickered to where Wen Ning's sword hung, a silent warning.

Stunned, Wen Ning breathlessly greeted, “A-Jie-”

Wen Ning's greeting was cut short as a blade pressed against his neck, a menacing threat hanging in the air.

“Don’t move, or I’ll kill him!”

The cultivators braced themselves for Wen Qing's wrath, but her composed demeanor on the screen suggested otherwise.

Jin Ling expressed bewilderment, asking, “Huh? What’s going on?”

“Maybe Wen Qing knew that A-Xian wasn’t going to hurt his brother,” Jiang Yanli speculated, but honestly, she might be entirely wrong.

Wen Qing maintained her composure as she calmly shut the door behind her and proceeded forward.

“Very well,” she stated. “Proceed. In any case, he brought it upon himself.”

“**Jie?” Wen Ning cried out. “Jiejie?”**

“Is she your sister?”

“Don’t call me sister,” Wen Qing snapped, causing Wen Ning to recoil.

Her reaction left everyone even more puzzled.

‘Is she as harsh as Madam Yu?’ they all wondered.

“Have you lost your mind?” Wen Qing asked. “Since when have you been so bold? How dare you hide people?”

“He’s not losing his mind," Nie Huaisang retorted. “He’s simply adapting to the circumstances at hand, which I say is pretty much a brave thing to do.”

Wen Qing shot Nie Huaisang a glare but said nothing more. She acknowledged that he had a point, but potential risks were inevitable.

Letting out an exasperated sigh, Wen Qing continued, “So this is why you wanted to go to Yunmeng. How conceited can you be? Who gave you such audacity? If Wen Chao discovers this, he will stop at nothing to destroy you! If he is truly determined to kill someone, do you think I can stop him? The Wen Clan has declared that anyone who sees those two must eliminate them. Every child in the streets knows they are marked for death.”

Jiang Yanli couldn't help but pale at her words. The situation was indeed dangerous, but if Wen Qing were to disclose their whereabouts, then it’s over. However, seeing how Wei Wuxian placed complete trust in the two, perhaps Wen Qing was able to do something.

And she was going to hold on to that.

‘A-Xian, A-Cheng,’

Wen Qing's inquiry was filled with audacity as she questioned, “How dare you hide them?” Her imposing stature and piercing gaze only added to her intimidating presence. With her haughty demeanor, elevated status—equivalent to that of Wen Chao—and resplendent crimson attire, Wen Qing had the ability to unnerve almost anyone.

However, despite the circumstances, Wen Ning dared to speak up.

“But… But Wei-gongzi….”

“I care not for the grievances between the two of you. While gratitude may serve as a valid motive for one's actions, it cannot be sustained indefinitely. You went suddenly and left suddenly, a time in which Wen Chao lost track of them. Do you truly believe Wen Chao to be so foolish? Sooner or later, his search will lead him here! What do you anticipate will occur then?”

When presented in this manner, it became evident that Wen Qing's optimal course of action was clear.

“You’re not going to, right?” Jiang Yanli pleaded futilely, yet Wen Qing remained silent, unable to deny that the thought had crossed her mind.

Jiang Yanli anxiously bit her lip and redirected her attention to the screen. No, Wen Qing would never stoop to such levels. She would place her trust in her A-Xian's judgment.

Wen Ning's voice rang out, calling for his sister’s attention, the sword at his neck barely registering in his mind, “Jiang-gongzi is also injured! He can’t move! Moreover, it’s… the Wen Clan’s fault.”

Wen Qing, after a moment of contemplation, shook her head and firmly stated, “What the Wen Sect does is not our responsibility. We should not be held accountable for their actions.”

An elderly cultivator, unknown to the group, interjected with a sly smile, “You still carry the blood of the Wen Clan. Claiming innocence from their sins is quite bold.”

Wei Wuxian, with a dark edge to his voice, reminded everyone, “Wen Qing's family is a separate branch of the Wen Clan, focused on healing rather than cultivation.”

The old man, sensing the tension rising, chose not to push the matter further as Wei Wuxian's eyes began to change color.

'Coward,' Wei Wuxian thought.

Behind Wen Ning, Wei Wuxian's glare sharpened.

"Wei Ying, don't look at me like that," Wen Qing ordered. "I am a healer, not a killer. My duty is to save lives, not to harm those from the Jiang Sect. Besides, your lives are not my concern."

The Jiang family and Wei Wuxian's parents reacted strongly to Wen Qing's words, their expressions hardening at her final statement.

Yu Ziyuan's voice dripped with disdain as she retorted, "Excuse me?"

Wen Qing, unfazed, started to walk away, concluding, "I have no reason to risk the dozens of lives in my branch of the clan just for your sake."

Mianmian, observing the scene, commented, "…Understandably, she prioritizes her family, but it's still a tragic situation."

As Wen Qing raised her hand to open the door, a voice interrupted her movement.

"Do you think he could have come this way?"

Wei Wuxian's muscles tensed. Realizing his intimidation tactics were ineffective, he released Wen Ning and positioned himself protectively in front of Jiang Wanyin.

'Protecting Jiang Wanyin again despite everything else,' Madam Lan thought to herself and turned to look at Wei Wuxian. *'You really are something else.'*

As Jin Ling gazed at his dajiu, memories of their shared journey at Yi City flooded his mind, reminding him of the protection Wei Wuxian had provided, even when unconscious. At that moment, Jin Ling understood why some had likened earning Wei Wuxian's loyalty to forging a sturdy bridge across turbulent waters.

Just as a bridge withstands the force of raging currents, Wei Wuxian's loyalty remained steadfast, unwavering in its commitment to those he cared for. He also realized that Wei Wuxian's loyalty was not simply given—it was earned through acts of selflessness and sacrifice, forged in the fires of adversity. And once pledged, it became an unbreakable bond, a lifeline amidst the chaos of life's storms.

Imagining Wei Wuxian's presence during his youth, Jin Ling wondered how he would have reacted. Would he have indulged him? Protected him from the ridicule and scorn of his peers?

At that moment, Jin Ling could envision it all...

Damn, he really doesn't need any more reason to admire him.

"They did say they saw a boat go towards Yiling. Should we spread out the search?"

Wei Wuxian felt a bead of cold sweat trickle down his forehead. Wen Qing, deep in thought, directed her gaze towards the door. Sensing the urgency, Wen Ning hurriedly approached her, clutching her sleeve and shaking his head in a silent plea.

Wen Qing, unmoved by her brother's desperate gesture, let out a sigh.

"What's all this commotion?" she snapped.

"Eh? Lady Wen! Our people are searching for Wei Wuxian."

“Please don’t tell them,” Wei Changze whispered, praying to the heavens that Wen Qing would not reveal his son's whereabouts.

“This room…” she turned her head, her eyes meeting Wei Wuxian’s, “has no one called Wei Wuxian.”

His eyes widened in disbelief.

The cultivators who had been holding their breaths finally exhaled, their bodies relaxing in relief. Lan Wangji and Wei Wuxian's parents expressed their gratitude towards Wen Qing, to which she responded with a nod.

Though, internally, Wen Qing believed that she did not deserve their appreciation. She had not protected Wei Wuxian enough in the past, leaving him alone when he needed people by his side.

Lan Qiren and Nie Mingjue were deeply impressed. She really did protect Wei Wuxian in her own way. However, a lingering question remained in their minds: did all members of the Wen clan truly deserve to die? Are these two really a Wen when they’re acting recklessly like this? The answer to this question remained elusive, but the idea was there. They would have to continue delving into Wei Wuxian’s memories to find the answer.

“My brother has been unwell lately,” she continued. “He’s in poor health. Keep your voices down and stop bothering him.”

“Ah, y-yes! We were just leaving!”

With the departure of the soldiers outside, Wei Wuxian found himself frozen in place.

Wen Ning, who had been eavesdropping at the door, suddenly perked up and exclaimed, “Great, they're gone!”

Nie Mingjue slowly turned his gaze towards Nie Huaisang, his eyes filled with contemplation. The similarities between them were undeniable, yet they were also vastly different. Both possessed a timid nature, lacking in confidence and prone to stuttering and trembling. However, their differences lay in their cultivation abilities. Wen Ning showed great potential to become a formidable cultivator, with the right guidance and practice. On the other hand, Nie Huaisang's cultivation was strong enough to maintain a youthful appearance, but he lacked the drive to improve and master the art of wielding a saber.

He sighed. Could it be that his growing fondness for Wen Ning stemmed from the resemblance he bore to Huaisang? But he was still a Wen!

He refuses to accept anyone with the blood of a Wen.

Exhaling once more, Wen Qing redirected her attention towards Wei Wuxian, “I’m in charge of Yiling. Don’t raise a fuss.”

Having said that, she left the room.

Suddenly, Wei Wuxian felt the rush of adrenaline dissipate from his body. He settled himself on Jiang Wanyin's bed, relying on Wen Ning's sword to maintain his upright position against the ground.

“Don’t worry,” Wen Ning reassured him. “My sister is an exceptional doctor.”

“I can attest that,” Wei Wuxian chuckled, but Wen Qing did not take kindly to his remark and shot him a glare.

“Shut up, Wei Wuxian.”

“The esteemed healer, Wen Qing,” Wei Wuxian muttered. “Naturally, she is skilled.”

“Ah, my sister won’t expose you,” Wen Ning added unnecessarily. “If that’s what you’re worried about.”

From his seated position, Wei Wuxian's eyes shimmered before closing.

“Thank you,” he whispered.

“Wei Ying,” Lan Wangji muttered as he stood near Wei Ying, his voice barely audible. To see Wei Ying, who’s usually filled with happiness, optimism, and mischievousness, now experiencing a sense of hopelessness, pierced Lan Wangji's heart. It pained him deeply to witness his beloved in such despair, especially knowing that there was little he could do to alleviate it.

Regret washed over Lan Wangji as he reflected on his decision to leave Wei Ying after the Xuanwu cave rescue. Perhaps he should have agreed to temporarily recuperate at Yunmeng Jiang. However, considering his injuries, would he have been capable of doing anything? Even protecting his husband from the Xuanwu of Slaughter had proven to be a difficult task.

He internally sighed. He despised feeling so utterly useless in moments like these.

“Now, now,” Wei Wuxian's voice broke through Lan Wangji's inner turmoil, interrupting his thoughts. “What is occupying your mind now, my dear husband?”

Lan Wangji responded with a simple, “Nothing.” He had no intention of burdening his husband with his worries.

Suddenly, Jiang Wanyin shifted on the bed.

“Jiang Cheng?” Wei Wuxian immediately spun around to check on him.

“A-Cheng,” Jiang Yanli breathed in relief.

Jin Ling's face brightened as he called out, “Jiujiu!”

“He's regaining consciousness,” Wen Ning realized. “I will fetch some medicine.”

Slowly, Jiang Wanyin’s eyes scrunched together, then blinked open.

“Jiang Cheng?” Wei Wuxian asked again.

Yu Ziyuan and Jiang Fengmian felt a glimmer of hope rekindling within them as they saw their safe and sound. The tension that had gripped their clenched fists finally began to dissipate.

Jiang Wanyin's exhaustion was evident, with dark circles under his eyes and a noticeable pallor on his skin. His slouched posture only added to the appearance of his weariness, making him seem barely alive.

Upon seeing Jiang Wanyin, Wei Wuxian couldn't help but breathe a sigh of relief. “Jiang Cheng,” he whispered. The relief he felt was evident in the soft smile that graced his face.

With the alleviation of hopelessness in Wei Wuxian's expression, the other cultivators, particularly Cangse Sanren and Wei Changze, also felt a sense of relaxation wash over them.

“I hope that smile never disappears,” murmured a female cultivator sadly.

“You know that’s impossible,” her friend responded, sharing in the sadness.

Several seconds passed, and Jiang Wanyin remained unresponsive.

“Jiang Cheng, you… can you see me? Can you hear me? Do you know who I am?” Wei Wuxian asked.

Jiang Cheng wasn’t deaf. However, the fact that he remained completely silent only heightened the concern surrounding him.

“What’s wrong with you? Why aren’t you responding to Wei Wuxian?” Yu Ziyuan inquired, her voice filled with a mixture of worry, anger, and bewilderment.

Jiang Wanyin did not respond.

“That damned Wens,” Jin Zixuan cursed. “They must’ve done something to him!”

“Is he paralyzed?”

“Looks like it.”

“He’s unresponsive too.”

“What could the Wens have possibly done to him to make him appear so... dead?”

“What happened to you?” Wei Wuxian anxiously questioned, extending his hand to check Jiang Wanyin's temperature.

Jiang Wanyin batted his hand away.

“Well, that answers your question,” Song Lan said to the cultivators whispering at the back.

Mianmian and Jiang Yanli carefully observed Jiang Wanyin's condition. Unfortunately, he was very weak and somewhat unresponsive, but thankfully not paralyzed. However, these observations did not provide an explanation for his weakness. Could it be that he had endured such severe torture that speaking or moving had become so hard for him? The mere thought of the cruelty inflicted upon him sent chills down their spines.

As Wei Wuxian gazed at him with a puzzled expression, Jiang Wanyin focused on his trembling hand. There was no visible emotion of shock, fear, anger, or panic; instead, Jiang Wanyin seemed trapped in an eerie state of calm.

Jiang Wanyin glanced down at the mark across his chest.

The discipline whip had been used on him. Even if it had been just once, the experience was likely more intense than anything he had ever encountered before. The mark would be a permanent reminder of that ordeal.

“D-Discipline whip?!” Jiang Yanli exclaimed, horror spread across her face.

Yu Ziyuan's fury blazed like wildfire, her voice laced with indignation and outrage. “How dare they?!” she exclaimed, her eyes flashing with anger. The audacity of the Wen Clan to lay their hands on her son filled her with an overwhelming sense of fury and disgust.

Now, both brothers bore the marks of their bravery and loyalty, etched into their skin for eternity and all to see. But it was also a mark of shame and humiliation, a constant reminder of the tyranny they faced at the hands of the ambush and the Wen Clan.

Even Jiang Fengmian, who had been calm most of the time, felt anger course through his veins seeing his son’s state. But unlike Yu Ziyuan, his anger was quite tamed, but it can be felt by everyone in the room.

“Stop looking at it,” Wei Wuxian offered his advice, urging Jiang Wanyin to divert his gaze from the mark. “There must be a solution to remove it. Don't let it trouble you.”

In an attempt to understand his brother's distress, Wei Wuxian leaned in closer, seeking to identify the source of his unease.

Unexpectedly, Jiang Wanyin retaliated by slapping him.

Nie Mingjue frowned and thought to himself, ‘What could be the reason behind this repeated aggression towards Wei Wuxian? What could have repulsed Jiang Wanyin this time?’

While Nie Mingjue empathized with Jiang Wanyin's mourning for Yunmeng Jiang and their parents. However, it is rather tiring to see that he is channeling his grief towards someone who is equally grieving and making sincere efforts to be there for him. Wei Wuxian has already shown immense patience and understanding by allowing Jiang Wanyin to vent his frustrations on him in the earlier memories.

Come on, he needs to come to terms with his emotions and focus on seeking justice, rather than allowing his grief to cloud his judgment and affect his relationships with those who care for him.

Unyielding, Wei Wuxian added, “Go ahead, strike me. If it brings you solace, then so be it.”

“Did you feel it?” Jiang Wanyin asked.

Wei Wuxian paused, seeking clarification, “Feel what?”

“Did you feel my spiritual power?”

A foreboding sensation began to wash over the cultivators, leaving them with a sense of dread and horror.

“W-What does that mean?” Jiang Yanli, her voice trembling, stuttered,

“What spiritual power? You didn’t try to use any.”

“I did.”

An increasing number of cultivators were becoming increasingly anxious and perplexed, their minds filled with questions and uncertainties as they all thought, “...What?”

Lan Qiren, in an attempt to provide an explanation, “He’s still weak. Perhaps that is why.” However, deep down, he couldn't shake off the feeling that this hope was naive and unlikely.

Jiang Fengmian's eyes widened, a sudden realization dawning upon him. He whispered a response to Lan Qiren's assumption, rejecting it entirely, “N-No, that's not it. T-There's something wrong.”

Wei Wuxian furrowed his brows, his face displaying his confusion. “What exactly are you talking about” he asked, seeking clarification.

“I did,” Jiang Wanyin repeated his previous statement, his voice unusually quiet and devoid of his usual vigor. “I exerted the full strength of my spiritual energy in that strike. Tell me, did you feel it?”

Wei Wuxian paused for a moment and then suggested, “Why don't you try again?”

“It’s fine,” Jiang Wanyin made a decision, his voice filled with resignation. “It’ll be the same result no matter how many times I try.”

Madam Jin, growing impatient with the cryptic conversation, whispered, “What does that mean? Stop being so cryptic and tell us!”

Even Qingheng-jun and Yu Ziyuan, who had remained composed until now, began to feel a sense of unease creeping into their hearts.

Jiang Cheng's tone of voice was almost indifferent, devoid of any emotion. He had surpassed feelings of sadness, despair, and hopelessness, reaching a state of apathy where nothing seemed to affect him anymore.

Inside him, there was nothing but emptiness.

As if reflecting the turmoil within, thunder rumbled ominously outside.

A moment elapsed, and Jiang Wanyin proceeded to speak, his words hanging in the air like a heavy fog, “Do you know how Core-Melting Hand got his name?”

A collective gasp escaped from the onlookers as if they had been doused with an icy shower. The anticipation of what Jiang Wanyin was about to reveal gripped them with fear and trepidation.

Madam Lan, her voice trembling with horror, expressed her disbelief, “There’s no way,” unable to fathom the implications of his words.

“Because his pair of hands can melt away the golden core so that you can’t ever form a new one again. Your spiritual power will disperse, and you’ll become an average person,” Jiang Wanyin's laughter pierced through the silence, resonating eerily. His laughter carried a sinister undertone. The dark circles under his eyes seemed to deepen, transforming into abyssal voids that devoured any trace of light.

Jiang Wanyin's words painted a bleak picture, emphasizing, “Those who descended from the cultivation world would be reduced to insignificance, akin to mere good-for-nothings.”

“What are you saying, A-Cheng?” Jiang Yanli, her heart pounding erratically, demanded. “I don't like this. You shouldn't be saying this!”

Jin Zixuan, his face contorted with horror, shook his head in disbelief and horror sinking in, responded to his wife, “I think... I think I have an idea of what he's going to say next.”

“Your whole life will be spent doing worldly business,” Jiang Cheng muttered. “You aren’t allowed to dream of being at the top ever again. A-Niang and A-Die had their golden cores melted away by Wen Zhuliu first and lost the ability to resist before they were killed by him.”

Yu Ziyuan and Jiang Fengmian were unsurprised by this because of course their fight had to end with Wen Zhuliu crushing their cores, yet to hear it made them flinch.

Yu Ziyuan and Jiang Fengmian were unsurprised by this. Yet, the loss of both the Matriarch and Patriarch in such a manner was not only a tragic event but also a blow to the pride and reputation of their sect. Their positions as leaders of one of the most formidable sects had been a source of prestige and influence, but their downfall brought shame and humiliation. Their deaths not only represented a personal loss but also tarnished the legacy they had built for their sect, which had once stood proudly at the top of the hierarchy.

The attack really served as a sobering reminder of the fragility of power and the unpredictable nature of fate, shaking the foundations of the sect and leaving its members to grapple with the aftermath of such a significant loss.

And Jiang Cheng knew that better than anyone.

Wei Wuxian was overcome with fear, his mind in complete disarray. He found himself at a loss, unsure of what to do. The shock he experienced forced him to take a step back, his voice barely audible as he repeated, “...The Core-Melting Hand... The Core-Melting Hand...”

Lifting a hand to cover his eyes, Jiang Cheng whispered, "Wen Zhuliu, Wen Zhuliu. I want revenge. I want revenge, but how could I?"

A sudden burst of laughter escaped his lips, echoing through the air.

The implications of his words…

The implications of his words hung heavy in the atmosphere, causing all the cultivators present to turn their attention towards Jiang Wanyin. Their expressions twisted into a mixture of dread and disbelief, rendering them lost and frozen in their places.

Jiang Wanyin…

"Lost his core," Lan Xichen murmured, his eyes widening in shock.

"I don't have a core anymore. I won't ever be able to form a core again! Revenge? How can I get my revenge now?!"

Jiang Wanyin's words echoed through the room, a stark revelation that sent shockwaves rippling through their ranks. Gasps of horror and disbelief filled the air as the gravity of his statement settled upon them.

"Oh my god!"

"No…No way!"

Jin Zixuan clenched his jaw and fist. Jiang Wanyin, a person who did not consider his friend or acquaintance, but a formidable cultivator, had permanently lost his core.

He may not be his friend, but it struck him with a sense of profound despair.

He laughed and laughed and laughed. His laughter built on itself until it became an unsettling sound of madness. But why not? What did Jiang Cheng have to live for now that he had lost his core?

What else could he do?

Yu Ziyuan's emotions swirled within her, a tumultuous mix of shock, disbelief, and fury. As she turned to her son, her heart ached with a mother's concern and a leader's resolve. The realization that her son had indeed lost his core, confirmed by the memories she had witnessed, fueled her anger to a boiling point.

She’s furious…

She’s furious to the point of entertaining thoughts of summoning Wen Zhuliu back again, of exacting a brutal vengeance upon him for the harm he had inflicted upon her son and for crushing his core. But as her rational mind fought to regain control amidst the storm of emotions, she grappled with the futility of such an action. What purpose would it serve to torture Wen Zhuliu now, when her son, the current Jiang Wanyin, stood before her with a core stronger than ever?

The clash of emotions within Yu Ziyuan left her torn between the desire for retribution and the realization that it would bring no true solace.

Everything doesn’t make sense!

‘Wen Zhuliu, you fucking bastard!’

Wei Wuxian took a step back, only to stumble and collapse onto the ground, rendered speechless.

More and more cultivators were now feeling a sense of pity towards Jiang Wanyin.

Jiang Yanli, feeling the weight of sorrow in her heart, could not help but shed tears at the sight of her brother's pain. *'Oh, A-Cheng,'* she thought sadly.

'Fuck,' Jiang Wanyin cursed internally, feeling the piercing gazes of those around him at the vulnerability he was displaying. *'This vulnerability was one of the reasons why I despised showing weakness.'*

To Jiang Wanyin, his cultivation was his everything. Wei Wuxian understood Jiang Cheng's ambition better than anyone, and now...

Even without a particularly strong core, Nie Huaisang understood that cultivators' life revolved around their cultivation. This was especially true for Jiang Wanyin, who now harbored a deep desire for revenge.

Turning to Jiang Wanyin, his fan partially covering his face, Nie Huaisang felt a sense of empathy towards him. He knew what it was like to lose something dear and to feel powerless and hopeless. Yet, he also admired Jiang Wanyin for the person he had become and for upholding his sect's legacy.

With a single strike of the Core Melting Hand, Jiang Cheng's dreams, cultivation, self-esteem, and hopes for revenge were all shattered to pieces.

Mianmian, looking down with a solemn expression, felt a mix of sadness and anger towards Jiang Wanyin's plight.

In a situation like this, what could Jiang Cheng do but laugh?

“I don’t even have my golden core,” he whispered through his laughter. “There’s just no way!”

Outside, the thunder rumbled again, and a flash of lightning cut through the sky.

“This does not make sense!” a female cultivator exclaimed. “How is it possible for him to have reached his current state without his core? It defies all logic!”

“Yeah, I did find this odd too,” Qingheng-jun concurred, his countenance turning serious as he thought of alternative solutions, but to no avail. The absence of any historical accounts of a cultivator regenerating their core only added to the mystery. Turning to Lady Wen, he inquired, “There has been no record of a cultivator growing another core. Lady Wen, do you have any record since you’re a doctor?”

The question hung in the air, causing a subtle ripple of unease among Wei Wuxian, Wen Qing, Wen Ning, and Jiang Wanyin. Their discomfort did not go unnoticed by Qingheng-jun, whose perceptive gaze missed no detail.

‘Hmm,’ he thought…

“I'm afraid, Qingheng-jun, that there are no records of such a miraculous occurrence,’” she responded after hesitating for a moment. “And I highly doubt there ever will be.”

Wen Qing's response, though seemingly straightforward, failed to alleviate the growing skepticism of some cultivators.

Even Jiang Fengmian regarded her with a frown, sensing the reluctance in her words and suspecting that she was hiding something.

In the midst of this tense atmosphere, Jin Zixuan silently moved closer to the real Jiang Cheng, offering his support in this perplexing situation.

The symphony of nature's fury and Jiang Wanyin's laughter enveloped them, creating an atmosphere charged with both dread and tension. As the branches outside rattled like a stampede, Jiang Cheng's laughter echoed through the room, filling the space until it was the only sound that could be heard.

In the midst of this chaotic cacophony, Jiang Cheng's question pierced through the air like a lightning bolt, "Wei Wuxian, why did you bother saving my life?" with a raw intensity that left no room for evasion.

Wei Wuxian met Jiang Cheng's gaze head-on, his expression a mixture of defiance and vulnerability.

Of course, everyone knows the answer to that, yet no one bothered to utter a word, sensing the heavy tension within the room.

"Why did you bother saving Lan Wangji?!"

Jiang Wanyin's anguished scream from the earlier memory echoed through the room, overlapping with his current question. The sudden convergence of past and present pierced through the air like a dagger, causing a palpable shift in the atmosphere.

Lan Wangji, who stood nearby, paused, his typically stoic demeanor betraying a hint of emotion beneath the surface. The juxtaposition of Jiang Wanyin's accusation with the present moment reminded everyone of the complexities of their relationships and the wounds that still lingered unresolved.

"What's the use of saving me?! Now I have to live on in shame, watching the Wen-dogs go rampant, knowing I can't do anything?!"

“A-Cheng!” Yu Ziyuan's voice echoed through the air, breaking the silence that had enveloped her since earlier. Her son's anguish had stirred something deep within her, prompting her to speak out. “What does it matter if Lotus Pier is lost or if you possess your core? Your worth extends far beyond those material things. Your life holds more value than all of that combined, do you understand?!”

Her son had made the ultimate sacrifice, willingly sacrificing himself to save Wei Wuxian. She had no right to blame Wei Wuxian for her son's choices, nor did she have the right to hold him accountable for leaving her son alone in that alley when Wei Wuxian was looking for food.

However, it didn't mean that she wasn't consumed by anger at how everything had unfolded.

Everything got so much worse, and she’s so angry she can’t do anything!

Jiang Wanyin, her son, responded with a reluctant nod, acknowledging his mother's words.

Wei Wuxian had been grappling with the same thoughts as Yu Ziyuan, but his brother, Jiang Wanyin, would rather face death than settle for a mediocre existence. Who was to say he wouldn't sacrifice his own core for Jiang Wanyin?

Deciding to offer more advice, Jiang Fengmian spoke softly, “A-Cheng, seeking revenge pales in comparison to the importance of your life. No matter what happens, never lose hope. Please.”

Jiang Yanli, sitting beside her brother, added her own words of comfort. “Yes, A-Cheng, your life is precious. You still have me, and I cannot bear to lose my little brother like this.”

This was a touching moment, and no one dared disrupt such a moment. But the memory decided otherwise.

Jiang Wanyin's maniacal laughter echoed in the background, sending shivers down everyone's spine. The sheer madness in his eyes was enough to make anyone turn back to him, unable to tear their gaze away from the unsettling sight.

At that moment, Wei Wuxian's expression was a mixture of emotions that no one had ever witnessed before. It was a stark departure from his usual carefree demeanor, leaving those around him feeling a sense of unease and concern.

Cangse Sanren and Wei Changze, feeling their hearts constrict with worry, could sense the depth of their son's pain and fear.

Throughout the years, Wei Wuxian had always managed to maintain a sense of calm, even in the face of adversity. His ability to smile in the most challenging situations had been a source of strength for those around him. However, the current circumstances had pushed him to his limits, revealing a side of him that was unfamiliar and deeply troubled.

As Jiang Yanli had said, Wei Wuxian was born with a smile on his face.

But now-

As Wei Changze observed his son closely, he understood the gravity of the situation and the reasons behind Wei Wuxian's distress. Even if it was too late, he knew he had to offer comfort and reassurance to his son.

“You did not fail, A-Ying,” he said solemnly and turned to his son who was now looking at him with a shocked expression. “You have done your best.”

A simple yet powerful affirmation.

As Wei Wuxian's father's words reached his ears, his lips trembled with emotion. They echoed with a resonance that struck deep within his heart, evoking a sense of longing and sorrow for the understanding and acceptance he had yearned for from those closest to him.

Wei Wuxian's thoughts then turned to the sacrifices he had made, the trials he had endured, and the tears he had shed in pursuit of a solution to his brother's suffering. His father's words carried a profound truth—that perhaps, in the grand scheme of things, his perceived failures were outweighed by the greater good he had achieved.

Though he mourned for the things he had lost along the way, Wei Wuxian found solace in the knowledge that his actions had helped his brother find peace and fulfillment. Amidst the way, he had made choices that others deemed unacceptable, delving into practices labeled as unorthodox and evil, but to him, they were merely tools to achieve his ultimate goal—a sacrifice made out of love.

In the face of judgment and scorn from others, he remained resolute, for he knew that his actions were driven by a selfless desire to protect others.

Wei Wuxian's radiant smile illuminated the room, a stark contrast to the tears glistening in the corners of his eyes, and responded, “Thanks, A-Die.”

Wei Changze couldn't help but be overwhelmed with emotion. He held his son close, attempting to absorb the weight of all the hardships and selfless acts he had endured. The thought of his son enduring even more pain was almost unbearable.

He had enough of this. This was going to drive him insane.

Cangse Sanren watched the tender moment between his husband and son with a sad smile.

The door opened, and Wen Ning entered, his eager smile faltering at the sight before him.

At the same time, Jiang Wanyin froze.

“Wait, no!”

“Don’t get the wrong idea!”

Jiang Wanyin kicked Wen Ning to the ground, toppling over the bowl of medicine, causing it to shatter, its contents staining the floor. Without hesitation, Wei Wuxian sprang into action, rushing to help Wen Ning.

In a fit of rage, Jiang Wanyin turned his attention to Wei Wuxian as he grabbed him by the collar and shook him. “What’s wrong with you?!” he demanded, his voice filled with anger.

“Jiang Cheng-”

“What are you waiting for?! He’s from the Wen Clan! And you still went to help him? Kill him!”

Wen Qing's voice resonated with a solemn tone as she posed a thought-provoking question, “Is this the appropriate demeanor one should exhibit when bestowed with temporary shelter and protection?” Her furrowed brows conveyed her disapproval of the scene unfolding before her eyes.

In an attempt to diffuse his sister's mounting disapproval, Wen Ning interjected with a gentle tone, "A-Jie, perhaps Jiang-zongzhu is simply apprehensive—"

“Apprehensive? If anything, he is wary. While he may have the right to feel that way, it is not the manner in which he should conduct himself towards the person who extended their assistance,” Wen Qing swiftly interjected, cutting off her brother's words.

Jiang Wanyin felt a wave of shame wash over him as he averted his gaze to the ground, reflecting on the regretful actions of his past self. He could sense the disappointment emanating from Wen Qing, and it only added to his embarrassment.

“Well, Jiang-zongzhu was unaware of the identity of the person who came to help them, Aunt,” Sizhui mentioned in an attempt to soothe Wen Qing's agitation. “I can understand how unsettling it must be to have an intruder in one's room.”

Wen Qing let out a derisive scoff, "You're missing the point. He kicked A-Ning, that’s why."

“I’m sorry, Lady Wen,” Jiang Wanyin said, bowing his head. “It was truly disrespectful of me.”

Wen Qing gazed at him in silence for a brief moment before letting out a sigh. She really felt uncomfortable whenever someone bowed before her; it sent shivers down her spine.

“It’s fine.”

“Calm down, Jiang Cheng!” Wei Wuxian ordered, yet Jiang Wanyin wasn’t listening. Instead, his gaze fixated on the Wen flags adorning the walls, and comprehension slowly dawned upon his countenance.

“Where is this place?” Jiang Wanyin demanded, his voice filled with urgency. “Have you walked into a trap?!”

“No—”

“No?! Then how did we end up here? Don't tell me—you sought help from the Wen Clan?!” Jiang Wanyin shook him violently. “Do you want to die?!”

The air crackled with tension as the three men stood locked in a confrontation fraught with emotion and uncertainty.

“But Wei Wuxian had no choice,” A-Qing murmured, her voice barely audible, before shifting her gaze towards Jiang Wanyin. She carefully observed his expression before

returning her attention to the screen. *'Wei Wuxian needed a secure sanctuary to ensure your safety.'*

Wen Ning gazed at his younger self, feeling the sharp sting of accusation in Jiang Wanyin's words. However, he harbored no resentment towards him for his thoughts. After all, Jiang Wanyin had every right to feel what felt that day since he just got his core crushed by Wen Zhuliu.

Then, he collapsed forward, the weight of his coreless body felt unbearable, even the slightest movement proving to be too much.

"A-Cheng," Jiang Fengmian whispered, his despair hanging heavy in the air.

The unknown cultivator nearby seemed to be pondering aloud, his words dripping with disdain as he observed Jiang Wanyin. "Tch, are you starting to regret sacrificing yourself?" The cultivator mused, his tone laced with skepticism. "If his intention was to meet a heroic end while saving his brother, then it appears that fate has dealt him a cruel ha—"

"Shut your fucking mouth," Yu Ziyuan snapped.

Xiao Xingchen's voice cut through the tension, "If he truly felt remorse, he would have confessed to Wei Wuxian. But he hasn't, so it's clear he doesn't regret his actions."

Jiang Wanyin's eyes blazed with defiance, "I have never regretted my choices, not then and not now. Don't presume to understand my feelings."

"Jiang Cheng," Wei Wuxian said and reached out to support Jiang Cheng, concern etched on his face. "Jiang Cheng, you're injured. Don't—"

Pushing Wei Wuxian away, Jiang Wanyin shook his head, rejecting the help offered.

“Wei Wuxian!” he shouted, panting heavily as his laughter started up again. “My parents had just been gone, and yet you seek help from the Wens right away? What a brilliant senior disciple of the Yunmeng Jiang Clan you are!”

The deranged, insane laughter returned, shaking the building.

A silver needle gleamed in the air, and Jiang Cheng collapsed once more.

A faint blush tinted Jiang Cheng's cheeks as he slumped down, wishing he could just vanish into thin air. God, why did he have to be so embarrassing in the past?

“Who was that?!” Jiang Yanli demanded, her eyes widening as she noticed the needle that caused her brother to collapse.

“Are you two insane?” Wen Qing scolded. “Anyone could easily track you down with that loud laughter.”

Relief washed over Jiang Yanli's face, and Nie Mingjue couldn't help but be impressed by Wen Qing's decision to aid Wei Wuxian and Jiang Cheng.

Jiang Wanyin’s reaction might have seemed irrational to an outsider. However, Nie Mingjue couldn't ignore the fact that his own recent stance had been one of advocating for the wholesale eradication of the Wen Clan.

Yet, Nie Mingjue found himself grappling with doubts about the righteousness of his previous convictions. The stark contrast between the ruthlessness he had advocated for and the compassion demonstrated by Wen Qing and Wen Ning forced him to confront the moral complexity of his beliefs.

The realization that there might be alternative paths to justice, ones that didn't necessarily involve the wholesale slaughter of an entire clan, weighed heavily on Nie Mingjue's

conscience. At that moment, he began to question the validity of his previous convictions, uncertain if the path he had been advocating for was truly the right one.

'Was I wrong this whole time?' he pondered, stealing a glance at Wen Qing who was now focused on the screen. *'Do I need to reconsider my convictions?'*

"Jiang Cheng!" Wei Wuxian's voice echoed through the room, calling out to Jiang Cheng. He knelt beside his brother, paying no attention to Wen Qing's words, much to her annoyance.

Growing irritated, Wen Qing continued, warning him, "I'll throw you out immediately if you don't shut up."

"What did you-"

Interrupting him, Wen Qing commanded, "Don't remove the needle. That brat will throw a tantrum if he wakes up. I could hear him even from outside! Wait until his injuries have healed before taking it out. Let's not cause any trouble. I have no desire to interact with Wen Chao, and I especially don't want to deal with that woman he takes around with him."

"Wow."

"You truly are impressive, Lady Wen."

"You're truly on their side now."

"This is creepy. She's just like Yu-furen, but less aggressive."

"Shut it! She might hear you!"

Too late, Yu Ziyuan already did, and it only fuelled her annoyance at the situation.

“Thank you, A-Jie,” Wen Ning said.

Confidently, Wen Qing approached the fallen bowl, picking it up to examine it closely. She took a sniff and then glared, causing Wen Ning to jump in surprise.

“If you're truly grateful, then put in some effort! What kind of medicine is this? He's too weak to take a supplement right now! We need to focus on strengthening his body! How many times do I have to tell you that? I'll brew it myself!”

Smiles appeared on the faces of many.

“Oh my god.”

“She’s truly helping them.”

“Lady Wen insisted on doing the medicine. That’s so sweet!”

Wen Qing’s lips twitched at that.

In a huff, Wen Qing stormed away, leaving Wen Ning to assure Wei Wuxian, “My sister's medicine will surely surpass mine by leaps and bounds!”

Wei Wuxian, slightly out of breath, simply nodded in gratitude, “Thank you.”

It's a curious thing, really. Wei Wuxian can be polite when necessary, but he reserves that politeness for select moments, much to Lan Qiren's disapproval. Even if Wei Wuxian were to spend centuries at Cloud Recesses, it's doubtful he would ever truly change.

Well, for some unknown reason, in the deepest corner of his soul, he wished that Wei Wuxian would maintain his youthful, silly side of him until his death because, amidst the chaos and darkness that surrounded him, his youthful and silly demeanor would serve as proof that Wei Wuxian is still human.

In a sudden shift, the scene fast-forwarded to Wei Wuxian approaching Wen Qing.

“I wanted to ask a favor of you,” Wei Wuxian began, causing Wen Qing to pause and face him.

“What kind of favor?” she asked.

“I want medical books,” he demanded. “Every ancient text and medical book you can find.”

Baoshan Sanren let out a sigh. The time had come for Wei Wuxian's greatest sacrifice to be revealed. With a swift movement, she appeared next to Wei Wuxian, startling him and those around him with her sudden appearance.

Perplexed and taken aback, Cangse Sanren inquired, “Grandmaster?”

“I apologize, but it is time,” Cangse Sanren replied, shifting his gaze towards Wei Wuxian, who instantly grasped the message. A heavy sigh escaped Wei Wuxian's lips as his heart weighed down with sorrow.

It would be more merciful for him if he’s unconscious as the past resurfaces—to shield him from the anguish that would inevitably follow.

Wei Wuxian nodded at Baoshan Sanren.

“What do you mean by *‘it's time,’* immortal?” Lan Wangji asked, his anxiety slowly creeping in. The silent communication between them unsettled him.

Baoshan Sanren chose not to respond, instead pointing her index finger toward Wei Wuxian's forehead. Instantly, he collapsed and lost consciousness.

“Wei Ying!” Lan Wangji called out, swiftly catching his husband before he fell to the ground.

“What did you do, immortal?!” Wei Changze demanded, kneeling beside his son alongside his wife.

“The upcoming memories would be too overwhelming for Wei Wuxian to bear, so it is best if he does not witness them again. They will only trigger painful experiences,” Baoshan Sanren explained, turning her back to them as she made her way back to her place. However, before she does that, she utters one final statement, “Hold him close, for he will need an abundance of it from now on.”

The cultivators were left dumbfounded and bewildered.

Just what was going to happen?!

Wen Qing sighed wearily. For days now, the Jiang brothers had remained sequestered in their room, and Wei Wuxian had made a habit of pestering her with his insistent demands.

"Wei Wuxian, you need to rest," she reiterated, her tone gentle but firm, as she attempted to dissuade him from his pursuit.

But Wei Wuxian's determination remained unyielding. "I want medical books," he pleaded, his eyes beseeching her to heed his request.

“If Wen Qing cannot do anything other than heal his injuries, then that goes the same for you. Seeking out medical books will not help him manifest a new core. That’s just impossible.” The old cultivator's words cut through the air like a sharp blade, his annoyance evident as he dismissed Wei Wuxian's efforts with a disdainful tone. But before he could continue, his tirade was abruptly interrupted by the fierce scowl of Cangse Sanren.

Her glare bore into the old cultivator with a ferocity that silenced him, her words dripping with righteous indignation. “Why are you so mad about this?" she demanded, her voice laced with contempt. “My son is doing whatever he can to save Jiang Wanyin. You're mad at a child showing unwavering determination? How immature of you! At least he's doing something, unlike you old fucks who can’t even do light work.

The old cultivator's expression faltered, taken aback by the force of Cangse Sanren's rebuke. But then his annoyance increased twofold as his frown and anger became more evident, but he did not say anything back, seeing as the Wei and Lan families and Jiang Wanyin were already glaring at him murderously.

In the end, worn down by his persistence and unable to refuse him any longer, Wen Qing relented. With a resigned sigh, she retrieved the medical books he sought and handed them over to him, knowing that there was no use in arguing further.

Flash forward, and Wei Wuxian reads thoroughly every book Wen Qing has given him, and every time Wei Wuxian exhausts himself, Wen Qing enters with food with her.

Then the scene darkened and it was now late at night, Wen Qing was asleep on another table, while Wei Wuxian was wide awake, still looking for books. The bags under his eyes were now too evident, meaning he was looking for books without rest.

Yu Ziyuan stared at Wei Wuxian, her eyes tracing his every movement as he worked tirelessly on his research. She should have felt grateful that Wei Wuxian was dedicating himself so fervently to helping her son. Yet, amidst the swell of emotions within her, she couldn't shake a small pang of guilt that tugged at her conscience. Part of her wanted to scold him, to remind him sternly that he needed to take care of himself and get some rest. But

another part recognized the futility of such words, knowing that Wei Wuxian's sense of duty and responsibility to Jiang Cheng ran deep.

Well, she was the one who planted the idea of fulfilling obligations and duties on him; therefore, she couldn't scold him for doing the right thing.

'No,' she thought to herself, quelling the rising tide of guilt. *'I should not feel this way. It is Wei Wuxian's responsibility to protect my son, to look out for him, and to ensure his well-being. He has taken on this burden willingly.'*

While perusing the ancient wooden scrolls, Wei Wuxian chanced upon a particular one labeled *'Golden Core.'* Filled with hope, he promptly unfurled it and began to read. However, with each passing second, his once radiant smile gradually faded.

The cultivators were struck with astonishment, their faces turning pale as they gasped in disbelief.

"W-What?" Mianmian stammered, her voice trembling, as she laid eyes on the illustration within the scroll. "T-There's just no way!"

"No…" Cangse Sanren whispered, her head shaking in denial. "That's impossible—"

"He wouldn't dare to do something so outrageous, would he?!" Jin Zixuan blurted out, his gaze shifting toward the unconscious Wei Wuxian.

Lan Xichen, too, cast a solemn glance at Wei Wuxian, murmuring, "He just might," as he recalled the selflessness displayed by Wei Wuxian in his recent memories.

The scene then transitioned to Wei Wuxian and Wen Qing sitting outside their quarters, enveloped in a serene silence. Neither uttered a word, cherishing the tranquility. After a moment, Wei Wuxian turned to Wen Qing, his expression more grave than ever.

“I found a way to save Jiang Cheng,” he declared, causing Wen Qing to look at him in bewilderment.

A moment later, Wen Qing returned to the room, unwilling to listen to any more of Wei Wuxian's pleas.

“Please consider it,” Wei Wuxian pleaded. “It’s the only way to save Jiang Cheng.”

Jiang Wanyin clenched his fists, feeling a mix of emotions. He despised the sight of his brother begging for his sake, despised his brother's caring nature, and despised himself for leading Wei Wuxian down the path of demonic cultivation. He despised being a witness to it all.

“Just why, Wei Wuxian?” he muttered with a tinge of sadness and bitterness.

“I can’t do this!” Wen Qing declared.

At that moment, Wen Ning entered the room with a tray of food. Sensing the tension in the air, he placed the food down and cautiously inquired, “Jie, what happened?”

Despite Wen Ning's curiosity, Wen Qing remained silent and directed a warning towards Wei Wuxian, “Do you know the consequences of doing this?!”

Cangse Sanren and Wei Changze observed their son on the screen. If their suspicions were correct, then their son must have been aware of the consequences.

Realizing this, the couple experienced a whirlwind of emotions as they watched their son about lose something significant to him. They felt a profound sadness, a deep ache in their chests, as they witnessed his helplessness in the face of loss. Their hearts went out to him as they empathized with the pain and disappointment he must have been feeling. Yet, amidst this

sadness, another emotion surged within them: anger. They were infuriated by the injustice of the situation, the unfairness of their son losing something precious while someone else seemingly gained something equally valuable.

Everything was so unfair.

No one shall ever sacrifice something important to them for someone else without gaining something.

And yet, they understood how dire the situation is.

Cangse Sanren wanted to fight the Jiangs. It’s maddening to witness their son's loyalty has been exploited to the extent that he was willing to sacrifice his own well-being for their sake. They did not understand how deep their son’s loyalty was to them, and yet they were abusing him like some like of service dog. Had she been present during his youth, she would have undoubtedly guided him on where to place his loyalty and how to navigate such manipulative situations. She would have taught her son how to stand up against those who exploit his loyalty.

Kind of toxic and insane, but she is willing to become the villain to protect her son.

“Be thankful that loyalty is a thing, if not, my son would've shown you exactly what betrayal feels like, twofold,” Cangse Sanren snapped, and the Jiangs flinched at her words.

Wen Ning, ever the peacemaker, interjected with a plea to his sister, “Sister, if this is about Jiang-gongzi’s injuries, please help him. They’ve all been good to me. When they’re all fixed, let them leave. Wen Chao won’t know about this.”

“You’re not helping, uncle,” Sizhui sighed in response, prompting the man in question to cough slightly. It was evident that he had been rather naive in the past.

“You know Jiang Cheng,” Wei Wuxian began, taking a step forward and continuing, “He’s too competitive; he places an overwhelming emphasis on victory and defeat. Cultivation is his very essence. If he were to be stripped of that, his entire existence would crumble.”

“Then what about you?!”

Yes, really, what about him?

“Is he really going to do this?” Zizhen asked anxiously.

Knowing what he became after he killed Wen Chao prior to the Sunshot Campaign, it is clear that his path was already set. In that crucial moment, there was no room for doubt. His primary objective was to protect Jiang Wanyin from a fate of despair and to ensure that the tragic deaths of the Jiang Matriarch and Patriarch were avenged.

Jiang Fengmian clenched his fists. Yes, it was he and his wife who instilled the idea of protecting their son at all costs. And yet, to see it happening with his very own eyes, he despised it. He should’ve worded his last words correctly because Wei Wuxian would’ve chosen another path instead of following the destructive trajectory. But even with that existing option, it would’ve proven to be useless anyway.

In the end, they owe Wei Wuxian a lot for being their son’s brother and just as a person.

Wen Qing turned away from Wei Wuxian, conflicted with his pleas and her inner turmoil. But there was also Wen Ning who was clueless of what happened, uttered his sister’s name lowly in worry.

In a moment of silence, Wen Qing responded, “I can only guarantee a fifty percent success rate.”

Finally, Wei Wuxian let out a relieved sigh and smiled, “Then, that’s enough. Half-Half.”

Then, on the screen, the scroll Wei Wuxian had read earlier, rolled open and revealed written descriptions that the screen failed to show earlier.

Wen Zhuliu’s technique, the Core-Melting Hand; this method involves disrupting a cultivator's golden core by channeling a burst of concentrated qi, resulting in the lower dantian becoming fractured or misaligned. This transformation renders the cultivator ordinary and obstructs the formation of a new golden core. Restoring a damaged lower dantian requires a golden core while repairing or creating a golden core necessitates a healthy dantian. Nevertheless, transferring a golden core is perilous as it must adapt to a body with stagnant meridians, damaged dantian, and deficient qi pathways. The core must then stimulate the meridians and utilize that energy to mend or realign the fractured lower dantian. The guidance of an assistant or practitioner directing qi can aid in this process. If the new golden core successfully repairs the lower dantian, the dantian can evolve into a hub of qi and sustain the well-being of the new golden core.

And below the scroll was Wen Qing’s name.

As the truth unfolded before Yu Ziyuan, a heavy weight settled in the pit of her stomach, dragging her into a whirlpool of shock and disbelief. The sacrifice, so profound and so selfless, left her reeling with conflicting emotions. She couldn't comprehend everything, yet she comprehended it all, and fury blazed within her like a raging fire.

Just why did she feel more burdened with guilt than ever before? This feeling shouldn't be consuming her, as Wei Wuxian was simply fulfilling her wishes for her son. And yet, witnessing Wei Wuxian selflessly give everything to her son left her feeling utterly desolate. Why? Should she now offer an apology for the sacrifice he made? But why? Wei Wuxian did what was right. There’s no need for her to apologize, as that was his duty.

But...

But...!

Song Lan was taken aback by the revelation, his astonishment evident in his widened eyes and whispered words. “Incredible,” he murmured, struggling to comprehend the feat before him.

Qingheng-jun, intrigued by Wen Qing's explanation, inquired further. “What inspired you to consider the transfer of a golden core, Wen-guniang?” he asked, his disbelief palpable in his tone.

Wen Qing, composed yet uneasy, met Qingheng-jun's gaze steadily. “Initially just a passing thought, it evolved into a persistent idea,” she responded softly.

Song Lan, intrigued by the concept, leaned in closer. “But the idea of transferring a golden core is unprecedented. How did you even conceive of such a notion?”

Wen Qing pursed her lips. "While gathering more information about golden cores and listing several possibilities of what will be the results of a potential golden core transfer, I also remembered a passage in an ancient text I once studied," she explained. "It spoke of the possibility of splitting cores and core manipulation, albeit in a different context. Over the course of several months, that passing thought gradually transformed into a persistent idea. So I decided to explore it further.”

Qingheng-jun nodded thoughtfully. “Your ingenuity is truly remarkable, Wen-guniang,” he acknowledged, a hint of admiration coloring his words. “To conceive of such a solution speaks volumes of your resourcefulness and intellect.”

Wen Qing inclined her head modestly, her eyes reflecting gratitude. “Thank you, Qingheng-jun.”

In the midst of it all, Wei Changze and Cangse Sanren fixated their gaze upon her, their penetrating eyes seemingly piercing through her very soul. Undoubtedly, a myriad of inquiries swirled within their minds, yet they chose to postpone their interrogation for a later time.

Conversely, Wen Qing stood poised, fully equipped to address each and every query that may arise.

In an instant, the memory was transported to a scene where Wei Wuxian was seated beside Jiang Cheng's bedside, observing his peaceful slumber. Gradually, he extended his hand and concentrated his spiritual energy.

A crimson glow encased his palm, while his gaze remained fixed on Jiang Cheng.

The cultivators watched in stunned silence. The cultivation world's most sacred rule, the foundation of their power—the golden core—was being offered up, willingly, for the sake of another.

Was there a sacrifice more profound than this? Had Wei Wuxian endured even greater sacrifices than they had previously imagined? The reactions from the cultivation world varied greatly as they witnessed this act of unparalleled selflessness.

Some were incredulous, unable to reconcile the image of the notorious Yiling Laozu with the idea of a benevolent savior. They struggled to comprehend how someone they had deemed an enemy could commit such a selfless act.

Others felt a profound sense of betrayal, their trust in the established order shattered by the revelation of Wei Wuxian's actions. To them, it was a blatant disregard for the laws of the cultivation world, an unforgivable transgression that threatened the very fabric of their society.

As rumors spread and whispers echoed through the halls of the various sects, debates raged over the true nature of Wei Wuxian's motives. Some dismissed it as a mere ploy, a calculated move to garner support and sow chaos.

But amidst the shock and disbelief, there were those who found themselves grappling with a different emotion: admiration. Or was it truly correct to claim that Wei Wuxian was only admired by a select few? Mianmian and Lan Wangji were among those who truly appreciated him. They saw Wei Wuxian's act as a testament to his character, a demonstration of his

unwavering commitment to justice and compassion, even in the face of overwhelming opposition.

Now, they're wondering what would've happened if they tried to understand Wei Wuxian better. Perhaps, they could've prevented his death and then Wei Wuxian would've continued to be Jiang Wanyin's right hand and invent more innovations for the cultivation world.

Really, they wasted one of the greatest cultivators in the cultivation world.

After a bit of switching back and forth between his hand and Jiang Cheng, Wei Wuxian's gaze finally stilled. He took a deep breath, and his fear was replaced by determination.

He turned back to Jiang Cheng, the resolution clear in his expression.

"What a waste of a loyal soldier," an old cultivator muttered.

"And what's that supposed to mean, old man?" Jingyi snapped, his tone edged with barely contained fury.

Lan Qiren's voice cut through the tension like a blade. "Jingyi," he said firmly, his gaze warning against further confrontation.

In response, Jingyi scoffed and shot the old cultivator a defiant glare.

The man smirked, his words dripping with venom, "Just pondering how much Wei Wuxian is willing to sacrifice for the Jiang family without receiving anything in return. A slave, perhaps?"

The air crackled with tension, each word driving a deeper wedge between them, the silence that followed heavy with unspoken accusations.

"How dare you?!" Yu Ziyuan spat, her anger palpable.

Cangse Sanren's interjection cut through the rising tension like a sharp gust of wind. “But isn't it true?” she pressed, her words biting with accusation. “Your treatment of my son has been nothing short of slave-like. Why recoil now?”

Jiang Fengmian's snap broke through the escalating confrontation like thunder on a stormy night. “Enough, Cangse Sanren,” he commanded, his usually composed demeanor cracking under the pressure.

The cultivators around them were stunned into silence by Jiang Fengmian's uncharacteristic outburst, but Cangse Sanren felt a thrill of vindication. It was as if she was finally glimpsing the true nature of Jiang Fengmian.

“You dare raise your voice at me?” she retorted, her voice laced with bitterness. “Do I need to remind you that you and your wife are no better? You both mistreated my son!”

Yu Ziyuan's face flushed with rage as she countered, “And what right do you have to be so incensed? We provided for him and sheltered him. If you and your husband hadn't died then —"

Wei Changze's interruption was sharp, his glare piercing. “Enough, Yu Ziyuan,” he rebuked, his tone firm. “You are a woman of influence, but your words are crossing a line.”

Madam Lan then interjected, “Death is a harsh reality, unforeseen and inevitable,” she offered gently. “But dragging their deaths into this argument serves no purpose.”

Madam Yu's glare shifted to Madam Lan, but Qingheng-jun stepped forward, silently asserting his support for his wife.

Wei Wuxian's unwavering focus remained fixed on Jiang Wanyin, his eyes betraying a mix of conflicting emotions alongside a resolute determination.

Despite his fear, there was a clear sense of purpose in his actions.

Nie Mingjue, observing the scene, couldn't help but wonder about Wei Wuxian's intentions. He hoped for the best outcome, though deep down, he knew that something significant was about to unfold. It was a feeling shared by others present, a sense of impending change in the air.

'I just hope whatever plans he had will be successful,' Nie Mingjue thought.

Taking a deep breath, Wei Wuxian made his move. With a steady hand, he approached Jiang Cheng and retrieved Wen Qing's silver needle.

"Jiang Cheng."

Startled, Jiang Wanyin's eyes fluttered open, confusion evident in his expression. "Wens?" he questioned.

"They're no longer here," Wei Wuxian revealed.

After a moment of contemplation, Jiang Wanyin's body went limp, his form resembling that of a lifeless figure against the bed.

As Jiang Yanli watched her brother, Jiang Cheng, lying pale and weak in bed, her heart felt heavy with sorrow and worry. Every shallow breath he took seemed to echo in the quiet room, a painful reminder of his suffering.

Unable to bear the sight any longer, Jiang Yanli fought back tears that threatened to spill from her eyes. She wanted to reach out to him, to comfort him, to ease his pain in any way she

could. The urge to enter the screen and take care of him, to wrap him in her arms and shield him from the world's cruelty, was almost overwhelming.

But she knew she couldn't. The barrier between them, though only a memory construct, felt insurmountable. All she could do was watch helplessly, her heart breaking with each passing moment.

Yet, even as despair threatened to consume her, Jiang Yanli, who's now alive and well, found strength in her love for her brother. She vowed to stay by his side, to support him however she could.

"A-Cheng," she called out, holding her brother's hand and smiling at him "I'm here for you."

"I know, Shijie," he responded with a smile, reassured by her sister's presence—that everything will be okay.

Unnaturally composed, Wei Wuxian presented a smile reminiscent of Jiang Yanli and commenced his explanation.

"You've been asleep for a few days. You're very weak right now. Come and eat something."

Jiang Wanyin remained motionless.

They had previously caught glimpses of this, but it was becoming increasingly apparent that Jiang Wanyin would rather embrace death than endure a life devoid of his spiritual core. Their empathy for his predicament was profound, for anyone would be despondent upon losing something of great significance. Undoubtedly, a golden core was the very essence of their existence.

"Jiang Cheng, come on. Eat."

Wei Wuxian's words were met with indifference. From that point onward, everyone bore witness to a series of relentless attempts made by Wei Wuxian. However, when one lacks the will to live, no amount of effort can make a difference.

Regardless, Lan Qiren found himself continuously astounded by Wei Wuxian's unwavering determination. It served as a testament that beneath his unruly and mischievous nature, he truly possessed unparalleled resilience and perseverance. This led him to ponder again: had he been excessively severe in his lectures and reprimands towards Wei Wuxian? Was he too righteous or stubborn to delve deeper into his character? Was he truly one of the individuals responsible for shaping him into who he is now?

He took a moment to steal a glance at the unconscious Wei Wuxian cradled in his nephew's arms and let out a sigh. As always, introspection held great importance now. It would take time for him to fully accept the man and his actions.

Time passed, yet Jiang Wanyin remained immobile. He neither posed any inquiries nor consumed any water or sustenance. It appeared that his sole desire was death.

Finally, Wei Wuxian relented.

“Do you truly wish to die?” he inquired, his gaze directed downwards.

Jiang Wanyin then responded, “Even in life, I am unable to seek vengeance. Why should I not embrace death? Perhaps I shall be fortunate enough to transform into a vengeful spirit.”

“What—No,” Jiang Fengmian vehemently protested and directed his attention towards his son. “You shouldn’t say that, A-Cheng.”

“I know. I—I know,” Jiang Wanyin assured. “I would never do that. It's just that I was kind of….depressed that time so….”

“Regardless of the circumstances, it is inappropriate for you to say such things. Do you understand, A-Cheng?”

“Yes, Shijie.”

“You have undergone soul-calming rituals since your childhood. Even if you were to pass away, you would not transform into a malevolent spirit,” Wei Wuxian reminded him, pushing some more food toward him.

“If I am unable to seek vengeance, whether in life or death, then what difference does it make which state I am in?”

Jin Ling's expression turned sorrowful as he pictured his uncle transforming into a ferocious ghost, sending shivers down his spine, yet simultaneously causing his heart to ache.

The fact that all ferocious ghosts must be exorcised or killed on the spot was something Jin Ling could not bear.

Meanwhile, Yu Ziyuan pinched the bridge of her nose. She had a strong urge to slap her son through the screen for his stubbornness. At this point, he would suffer from dehydration if he did not drink soon. Without access to his spiritual core, Jiang Cheng could not practice Inedia.

The last vestiges of Wei Wuxian's resistance appeared to crumble before their eyes.

Despite Wei Wuxian's attempts to engage him in conversation, Jiang Cheng remained stubbornly silent. For a while, Wei Wuxian sat beside the bed, quietly observing him.

The scene then shifted forward in time to evening, just as Wei Wuxian finished preparing a meal. Unfortunately, the dish bore the familiar bright red hue

characteristic of all of Wei Wuxian's meals.

“Ugh,” Jingyi cringed and shuddered. “This reminds me of ‘*that’* congee.”

Zizhen nodded and uttered, “Me too.”

Placing the food on the table, Wei Wuxian spoke up. “Get up. It’s time for dinner.”

Jiang Cheng paid him no heed.

The cultivators breathed out in frustration, starting to feel annoyed at Jiang Wanyin’s stubbornness despite the pity that they felt for him.

Even Wen Qing had the urge to slap the man right now, but doing so was pointless.

Wei Wuxian remained unfazed by Jiang Wanyin's reaction, simply lifting his chopsticks with a calm smile playing on his lips.

“If you don't regain your strength, how do you expect us to recover your golden core?” he teased, his tone laced with mischief.

At the mention of *‘golden core,’* Jiang Wanyin finally blinked, his expression betraying a hint of apprehension.

Madam Lan breathed out in a bitter sigh, “Why is he smiling like that knowing what he’s about to do?”

“Well,” Jin Zixuan began. “He probably thought that he could finally help Jiang Wanyin, even at the cost of his own well-being.”

“That still doesn’t give him the right to smile at all,” Mianmian snapped, her heart hurting from seeing Wei Wuxian trying to be strong. Although his unruly, mischievous flirtatious nature was very charming and annoying at the same time, she wanted this demeanor of Wei Wuxian back.

Everything—the sacrifices, pain, suffering, bloodshed, death—she doesn’t want to see it all now.

Jiang Cheng's disbelief was palpable as he uttered, “My core?”

“That's correct. You heard me correctly. I said we're going to *‘retrieve your golden core,’*” came the response.

Struggling to form words through his parched throat, Jiang Cheng questioned, “...You know how?”

“Yes, I do."

“The golden core inside of you is his!”

Lan Wangji closed his eyes, a heavy sigh escaping his lips as he recalled Wen Ning's revelation. The weight of knowing what his husband had endured, coupled with the regret of not fully comprehending the depth of Wei Ying's struggles in the past, weighed heavily on his heart. Clutching Wei Ying's unconscious form tightly, Lan Wangji feared that if he loosened his grip, his beloved would vanish before his very eyes.

The pain of simply knowing Wei Ying's suffering was excruciating, but the thought of witnessing the transfer of the golden core intensified his torment.

In truth, Lan Wangji was conflicted. Part of him wished to shield himself from the painful memories associated with the transfer, knowing it would reopen wounds that had barely begun to heal. Yet, another part of him felt compelled to bear witness, to confront the reality of what had transpired and perhaps find solace in understanding the depths of Wei Ying's sacrifice.

Despite his inner turmoil, Lan Wangji couldn't tear his gaze away from the screen. His eyes remained fixed, his determination to see the transfer through battling against the anguish that threatened to overwhelm him. For Wei Ying's sake and his own, he silently resolved to endure the pain and confront the truth, no matter how agonizing it might be.

As if he could feel his husband’s inner fear, he whispered into his ears, “Wei Ying, I’m here. I’m always here.”

At last, Wei Wuxian turned to meet his gaze.

“Have you forgotten who my mother was? Who Cangse Sanren studied under?” he questioned, his tone laced with a hint of reproach.

“...You mean…. You mean….” Jiang Wanyin faltered, unable to articulate his thoughts.

“It means I can take you to Baoshan Sanren’s mountain.” Wei Wuxian declared, his words carrying a weighty implication.

“But I thought he never…” Jiang Yanli's voice trailed off, her words carrying the weight of uncertainty as she recalled Wei Ying's elusive nature, his penchant for hiding truths beneath layers of playful facade.

“He must've known something but decided to hide the information all to himself,” an unknown cultivator interjected, his brows furrowing in disdain. “That’s selfish of—”

“Selfish?” Baoshan Sanren's interruption was sharp, her gaze piercing through the man who dared to speak against Wei Ying. Her eyes, like flames dancing in the darkness, held a fierce determination. “If anything, I'm grateful that my whereabouts remained concealed. I would abhor the thought of vermin flocking to my secluded mountain.”

Her words were a cascade of fire and ice, her tone carrying the weight of centuries-old wisdom. She then continued, “But I doubt Wei Wuxian possesses the knowledge of my whereabouts. My name and sanctuary were likely but pawns in his intricate game.”

As she spoke, the air seemed to crackle with latent energy, and the surrounding cultivators couldn't help but shiver in slight fear.

Jiang Wanyin's voice was barely audible as he uttered, “But... I thought you’d forgotten everything from your childhood.”

Wei Wuxian's response was evasive as he vaguely replied, “I do recall a few fragments. Certain phrases were incessantly drilled into my mind, to the extent that even I couldn't erase them. I can still hear a woman's voice echoing in my ears, repeatedly conveying a specific message, disclosing a location, and providing me with instructions. The voice explicitly stated that if I ever found myself in a dire predicament, I could ascend the mountain and beseech the immortal for assistance."

If the woman Wei Ying spoke of was indeed Cangse Sanren, then that wasn’t her who told him that. Yet, if the truth were to be uncovered, she alone held the key to her master's whereabouts. There was no one else who could confirm or deny the veracity of Wei Ying's claims.

Her son is lying…

Cangse Sanren clenched her fists, her heart heavy.

‘Wei Ying,’ she spoke internally, her gaze fixed upon her unconscious son. *‘Are you truly prepared to tread this path? Does your loyalty, your love, your sense of responsibility, run so deep?’*

Despite the circumstances prompting Wei Wuxian's gesture, it compelled Jiang Wanyin to rise from his bed. As he stumbled towards the table, Wei Wuxian placed a bowl and a pair of chopsticks before him.

“Eat,” he ordered.

“I think he's turning into you,” he remarked in a hushed tone, a playful glint in his eyes. Jin Zixuan's observation drew a chuckle from Jiang Yanli, her laughter a welcome respite in the midst of their turmoil.

Jiang Yanli’s eyes sparkled with amusement. “Well, wouldn't that be a sight to see?” she quipped, the tension of the moment momentarily forgotten in their shared laughter.

Observing Jiang Wanyin's hesitation, Wei Wuxian emphasized, “Eat. We can either converse over our meal or sit in silence.”

Without further delay, Jiang Wanyin swiftly shoveled food into his mouth, determined to endure the overwhelming spice.

As Sizhui and Jingyi observed Jiang Wanyin devouring his food with a desperate hunger, their animosity toward him softened into pity. Despite their dislike for him, they couldn't help but empathize with his desperate desire to reclaim his core. His actions spoke volumes, revealing the depths of his anguish.

Baoshan Sanren was an enigma. Yet, her reputation and expertise in cultivation led cultivators to believe that she possessed the ability to perform extraordinary feats, perhaps even miracles.

However, it wasn't the Immortal who came to Jiang Wanyin's aid, but Wen Qing and Wei Wuxian themselves. The realization dawned upon Sizhui and Jingyi simultaneously, their eyes meeting in silent understanding.

At that moment, their hearts swelled with profound sadness for Jiang Wanyin, Wen Qing, and Wei Wuxian. Despite their differences and past grievances, they couldn't help but feel compassion for those who had endured so much suffering and sacrifice.

Once he confirmed that Jiang Cheng had started, Wei Wuxian felt comfortable explaining, “I’ll take you there in a few days.”

“Today!”

"Look how enthusiastic you are, Jiang-xiong," Nie Huaisang remarked with a light chuckle, his relief palpable as he observed his friend looking more alive now. He couldn't help but feel happy that Jiang Wanyin seemed to be emerging from his state of despondency. After all, he much preferred this version of his friend, with sparks of life dancing in his eyes, to the somber figure weighed down by despair.

Madam Jin nodded in agreement, her expression softened with empathy. "Well, Wei Wuxian is giving him a chance at a miracle," she remarked, her voice tinged with a mixture of hope. Her words hung in the air, carrying with them the weight of endless possibilities and unanswered questions. In the midst of turmoil and upheaval, Wei Wuxian's actions offered a glimmer of hope, a beacon of light cutting through the darkness of uncertainty.

But in exchange for a chance at a miracle was a sacrifice.

So to say that it was a miracle was bittersweet.

“What's the rush for? Do you think a centuries-old immortal will disappear in just a few days?” Wei Wuxian jested, though his tone belied a somber undertone. “It'll take a few days because there are many taboos in place. If you anger the master, it'll be over for both of us.”

Jiang Cheng's suspicion grew, his gaze narrowing as he searched for any hint of deception in Wei Wuxian's demeanor. "You... are you lying to me?" he questioned, his

voice tinged with a mixture of uncertainty and desperation.

Instead of offering a direct answer, Wei Wuxian reached into his robes and took out a purple cloth.

The expressions of the gathered cultivators were sad and devastated as they beheld the sight before them. The once vibrant purple cloth, symbolizing the noble lineage of the Jiang Clan, now lay torn, scorched, and stained with blood—a stark reminder of the unfathomable tragedy that had befallen their kin.

Yu Ziyuan's presence filled the room with an intensity that sent shivers down the spines of those gathered. Her expression, wrought with a potent mixture of grief and fury, spoke volumes of the tumultuous emotions swirling within her. Anger radiated from her in waves in the face of such senseless destruction.

Jiang Fengmian, typically composed and stoic, faltered under the weight of sorrow as he surveyed the remnants of his family's heritage. His features contorted with anguish, his heart heavy with the burden of grief and regret. Each tear in the cloth seemed to mirror the fractures in his own soul, a silent testament to the pain that echoed within him.

Beside him, Jiang Yanli's delicate frame trembled with emotion, her eyes brimming with tears as she traced the torn edges of the purple cloth with her eyes. Jin Zixuan and Jin Ling, feeling the same pain as her, immediately moved to offer comfort, enveloping her in a tight embrace as they shared in her sorrow.

With his gaze lowered, Wei Wuxian pressed his lips together before speaking. “I requested Wen Ning to locate the bodies of Madam Yu and the Jiangs. They have been... laid to rest now. He also retrieved this for us.”

Disbelievingly, Jiang Fengmian's normally stoic demeanor faltered as he slowly turned to face Wen Qing. With a deep sense of gratitude etched into every line of his expression, he bowed low before her, his voice heavy with emotion. “Thank you. This is… a debt that can never be repaid.”

Even Yu Ziyuan felt a sudden surge of gratitude towards Wen Qing. Yet, her resolve remained unyielding, and instead of offering words of thanks, she simply fixed her gaze upon Wen Qing, her eyes conveying a silent acknowledgment of the debt owed.

Wen Qing, taken aback by the unexpected gratitude from Jiang Fengmian and the silent acknowledgment from Yu Ziyuan, nodded in response.

Jiang Wanyin's gaze dropped to the contents of the sack, where he discovered Jiang Fengmian's hair ornament and a clarity bell. A surge of emotion overwhelmed him, and tears streamed down his cheeks in a steady cascade. His breath hitched, and he sank to his knees, paying homage to the symbols of his parents with a deep bow.

Without a word, Wei Wuxian mirrored his gesture, demonstrating his reverence for Yu Ziyuan and the former Sect Leader Jiang.

Silence enveloped the scene as if the weight of their grief rendered speech impossible.

The screen then darkened.

In the hushed silence that enveloped them, the other cultivators watched on in profound sadness, their hearts aching in solidarity with the grieving brothers. Words seemed futile in the face of such profound loss, and so they stood in silent reverence, their own grief reflected in the tear-streaked faces of Jiang Wanyin and Wei Wuxian.

Jiang Yanli moved to kneel beside her brother and parents, her presence a source of comfort amidst the sea of sorrow. She reached out, placing a gentle one hand on her brother's shoulder and holding both her parent's hands on the other.

Jin Zixuan and Jin Ling, moved by the heart-breaking scene unfolding before them, exchanged a somber glance, their expressions mirroring the collective grief of those gathered.

Madam Jin's stoic exterior masked her sadness. Yu Ziyuan had been her friend for a long time, and despite the complexities of their relationship and the occasional friction between them, Madam Jin couldn't deny the deep bond they shared. Witnessing the demise of Yu Ziyuan and Jiang Fengmian, along with the tragedy that befell their clan, cut her to the core. It was agonizing to see her son and Wei Wuxian grieving for their fallen leaders.

As for Lan Qiren and Nie Mingjue, while they felt a tinge of sadness at the passing of the Jiang leaders, all they felt was a sense of solemnity and respect. Though they may not openly express their emotions, their silent observance spoke volumes of their respect for the fallen sect leaders and their legacy. In the quiet moments of reflection, they both offered silent condolences to the deceased and wished for the peace of their souls. Despite the distance their stoic demeanor may convey, their inner thoughts echoed with a sense of respect and remembrance for those who had passed.

Nie Huaisang let out a weary sigh, his gaze shifting between his unconscious friend and the solemn figure of Jiang Wanyin. "This is all too painful to witness," he lamented, his heart heavy. "Regardless, I am determined to bear witness to it all." *'And bring down those who wished for Wei-xiong's demise.'*

Mianmian nodded, "I agree. There's so much to unpack here."

Meanwhile, Cangse Sanren and Wei Changze observed Yu Ziyuan with keen insight, their eyes tracing the nuances of her expression as memories resurfaced. They could sense the inner conflict raging within her, a tumultuous storm of regret and pride warring for dominance within her heart. While they held little hope for a complete transformation, they couldn't help but detect a glimmer of remorse in her eyes—a faint echo of the regret she had once shown when pushing her son away. Yet, whether this would lead to true change remained uncertain, leaving them room to ponder the complexities of forgiveness and redemption.

"Whatever," Cangse Sanren grumbled. "I'll fight her whatever it takes. You can fight your friend too, A-Ze."

"Don't give me any more suggestions, A-Se," Wei Changze gently scolded. "I still feel remorseful and guilty for their demise."

“You truly possess a kind heart,” Cangse Sanren acknowledged, her voice tinged with a hint of admiration. “But in times like these, perhaps a bit of ruthlessness is unnecessary.”

As she knelt beside her son, her touch gentle and kind, Cangse Sanren couldn't help but feel a pang of worry for his well-being. “I hope he finds peace in his dreams,” she murmured, her gaze lingering on her son’s serene expression.

“I wish that as well, Cangse-qianbei,” Lan Wangji's voice held a whisper of longing as he gazed upon his husband's tranquil countenance.

Meanwhile…

“A-Cheng,” Jiang Yanli spoke and asked, “Are you okay?”

Okay? He’s definitely not okay, but he has to be.

“I’m alright, Iie.”

Amidst the somber moment, the screen unexpectedly flickered to life once more, prompting confusion among the gathered cultivators.

Sizhui's brow furrowed in puzzlement, “But wasn't that the conclusion?” he asked, his confusion mirrored by Jingyi's perplexed expression.

“I thought so, too,” Jingyi echoed, his tone laced with bewilderment.

Xiao Xingchen offered a thoughtful explanation, his voice carrying a hint of anticipation. "I believe we're about to glimpse the threads of memories of what is to come," he suggested, his words tinged with a sense of intrigue.

On a desolate peak, shrouded in the veil of dusk, a lone figure stood silhouetted against the fading light. Clad in black from head to toe, with only the hint of a straw hat adorning her head. A black cloth draped over her face concealed her identity, veiling her features in shadow as she surveyed the scenery with a watchful gaze.

Suddenly, the tranquillity of the scene was shattered as the screen glitched, plunging into a chaotic whirl of images. Now, two men lay sprawled upon the rocky terrain. Hovering over one of the fallen figures, two shadowy figures moved with a sense of urgency, their movements swift yet careful as they tended to the man.

The air crackled with tension as the two figures exchanged hurried words. Each word was laden with unspoken fear and apprehension, as if they were grappling with forces beyond their control, fighting against the inexorable march of fate itself.

And then, in an instant, the screen glitches once more, the image fragmenting into a kaleidoscope of shattered pixels and distorted shapes. Amidst the chaos, a piercing scream echoed through the ether, a haunting melody of despair and anguish that sent shivers down the spine and chilled the soul to its very core.

The cultivators were filled with shock and horror as they realized the source of the cry. Cangse Sanren and Jiang Yanli couldn't help but cover their mouths, their bodies trembling and tears welling up in their eyes. Wei Changze and Lan Wangji, on the other hand, felt as if their life force was being drained away. Their faces turned deathly pale as they listened to the scream.

“No…” Cangse Sanren muttered. “No…No...”

“That can’t be…!” Madam Lan was so shocked that she couldn't even finish her sentence.

“W-Why?” Wei Changze asked, his voice trembling and his fists clenched. “Why is he screaming? Why is he awake?”

“He had to,” Baoshan Sanren responded on behalf of Wen Qing, who couldn't speak. Wen Qing felt her heart being crushed as she heard the scream again. “Otherwise, the operation

would fail," she concluded, causing Cangse Sanren to look at her.

"What does that mean?!" Cangse Sanren demanded from her grandmaster, then turned to Wen Qing and demanded again, "What does my grandmaster mean?!"

"Don't pressure her, Cangse," Baoshan Sanren said calmly, facing her. "Everything will be explained later."

"Why do I have to wait to know? Why not now?!" Cangse Sanren demanded, ready to storm towards Baoshan Sanren, but her husband held her back.

"Cangse, arguing with your grandmaster won't help," he said. "Let's just comply for now. I'm sure we'll know everything later."

Cangse Sanren glared at Baoshan Sanren, but the latter remained unaffected, which felt incredibly unfair.

"….old on….Xian! You….to…..Jiang Cheng!" Wen Qing exclaimed, beads of sweat trickling down her flushed cheeks. She turned to Wen Ning with urgency, commanding, "Hold him down! ...needs to…..awake!"

"Sister!" Wen Ning's voice cracked with concern, "Why….anesthesia….work?!"

The siblings' cries echoed through the room, their anguish palpable as the operation took a turn for the worse.

"No! Please!" Cangse Sanren's voice trembled as she fell to her knees, tears streaming down her cheeks. "Oh god, please, A-Ying!"

"Don't…Wei Wuxian! ...sleep, Wei Wuxian!"

“K-Keep going, Wen Qing!” Wei Wuxian commanded. Despite the searing pain, his voice remained resolute.

“Ahhhhh!”

‘It hurts! It hurt so much!’

Lan Wangji's heart shattered into a million pieces. He struggled to draw a breath, unable to bear witnessing Wei Ying's agony any longer. It was too painful, too unbearable.

Closing his eyes, Lan Wangji turned away from the screen, pulling his husband into a tight embrace.

"Wei Ying... Wei Ying," he whispered, his voice choked with tears.

The atmosphere among the cultivators was heavy with a mix of fear, tension, shock, disbelief, horror, and pain. Wei Wuxian's anguished cries echoed through the room, indicating to them the immense suffering he was enduring. As they bore witness to a glimpse of the future, their animosity towards Wei Wuxian began to wane, replaced by a deep sense of regret and understanding. They found themselves apologizing for their previous misjudgments, finally comprehending the reasons behind his actions and principles.

“I feel like the biggest idiot in the world,” murmured an unknown cultivator, his fists clenched in self-disgust and anger.

“Should we all repent when this is over?” another questioned, his voice tinged with helplessness.

“It's futile,” came the resigned response. “No amount of self-punishment could compare to what Wei Wuxian has endured.”

“He’s been through so much,” Sizhui whispered, his voice choked with emotion. He couldn't help but feel a deep gratitude towards Wei Wuxian, knowing that without him, his family would have perished long ago.

‘A hero,’ Qingheng-jun thought to himself, his admiration for Wei Wuxian swelling within him. *‘No, it wouldn’t be enough to call him a hero. He’s something else.’*

Lan Xichen looked at the ground in shame as he remembered the words he said at Guanyin Temple. Why did he say those hurtful words to him? Was their tumultuous relationship and the challenges it has caused? Wei Wuxian's unconventional methods and free-spirited nature clash with the traditional values of the Lan Clan, creating tension and discord.

Or was it that Wei Wuxian is a disruptive force in his brother's life, leading him into difficult situations that compromise his duty and honor? His penchant for trouble and impulsivity may have placed his brother in compromising positions, tarnishing his reputation and standing within the clan.

Or was it that Wei Wuxian's association has hindered his personal and spiritual growth, preventing him from fully embracing his potential as a cultivator? Or was it because he was angry that his brother was in love with the cultivation world's enemy, and Wei Wuxian either did not acknowledge his feelings or mocked him?

After considering the options he had conjured, he realized there was only one correct answer.

He sighed deeply, regretting his words profoundly, and vowed to apologize to him once this ordeal was over.

Finally, the screen darkened.

Yu Ziyuan found herself at a loss, shocked and rendered speechless by the overwhelming surge of emotions, including anger that left her feeling utterly overwhelmed.

How could she reconcile her anger with the undeniable truth of his selflessness?

However, at this moment, beneath her conflicting emotions, she's slowly harboring a deep sense of gratitude and begrudging respect for Wei Wuxian. Despite her reluctance to show vulnerability, she privately acknowledges the magnitude of his sacrifice and the depth of his commitment to Jiang Cheng and the Jiang Clan. Was this her begrudging acceptance of Wei Wuxian's actions, albeit tempered by lingering feelings of resentment and pride?

In light of that, does she possess any grounds to offer an apology now?

Indeed, she does, although she lacks the knowledge of where to begin in expressing her remorse to another person.

She then looked at the unconscious Wei Wuxian for a moment, then looked at where his golden core was before turning her attention towards her son.

“I anticipate hearing the words I've long awaited upon my son's awakening,” Cangse Sanren stated, wiping the tears from her eyes, her gaze a fierce blaze directed at Yu Ziyuan. Yet, instead of the expected fiery retort, Yu Ziyuan's response was a silent contemplation, her expression a canvas of unresolved thoughts and unspoken words.

This unexpected silence sent ripples through the gathered cultivators, a palpable tension settling over the group like a heavy shroud. Among them, Jiang Fengmian's reaction was particularly striking, his features betraying a mixture of surprise and concern as he observed the unfolding exchange.

Jiang Wanyin was conflicted once again. He felt grateful to have another chance to be a cultivator. Yet amidst the overwhelming gratitude, he’s grappling with feelings of inadequacy and unworthiness. The weight of Wei Wuxian's sacrifice, coupled with the realization of the burden it places on him to live up to such a selfless act, would weigh heavily on his shoulders. Though he made a selfless act as well, it did not compare to Wei Wuxian's. He had been passed this, but again, he was starting to wonder if he was deserving of such a gift.

God, he really thinks he has stolen his core, but at the same time, he has to accept it with humility and gratitude. Despite any lingering doubts or insecurities, he knows that there is no way Wei Wuxian would reclaim his core, nor would he want to. Instead, he must honor Wei Wuxian's sacrifice by carrying his core with pride and honor.

Embracing this responsibility, he will use it to protect and uphold the values that Wei Wuxian held dear because this is the only way he can repay Wei Wuxian for his selflessness—to honor his sacrifice by living a life worthy of the gift he has been given.

“He’s truly one of a kind,” Song Lan said as the memories began to settle in his mind.

“Indeed, he is,” Xiao Xingchen agreed with a solemn nod. “I don’t understand why the cultivation world chose to vilify such a remarkable man.”

Xiao Xingchen's words struck a chord with many of the cultivators present, challenging their preconceived notions about Wei Wuxian. Despite expecting a barrage of insults and condemnation, a heavy silence fell over the gathering instead. Perhaps it was the presence of those who held Wei Wuxian dear, or perhaps it was the dawning realization of his true character. Regardless, it was a sobering moment for all.

“I don’t want Senior Wei to sacrifice himself again,” Jingyi declared, his voice wavering with emotion as he wiped away tears.

“Yeah,” Zizhen chimed in, slowly regaining his composure. “He always puts others before himself. I used to think it was just his duty as our senior, but it seems self-sacrifice is woven into the very fabric of his being.”

“That’s just how he is,” Jiang Wanyin interjected unexpectedly, causing a stir among the disciples with his rare display of insight. “There's nothing we can do to change that.”

“Dajiu,” Jin Ling addressed his uncle, his expression a mix of sadness and conflict.

“Then he takes after his mother,” Wei Changze remarked, turning to gaze at his wife with a knowing look.

However, instead of waiting for a response, Cangse Sanren spoke, her tone carrying a mix of resignation and lingering disappointment, “I don't have the right to be angry with you for carrying my son's core within you. It was his choice to give it to you. Though I cannot help but feel sadness and disappointment, Changze and I have no say in the matter. If it were up to me to decide for my son, I would have chosen differently.”

Her words landed with a weighty impact, yet Jiang Wanyin remained unaffected, understanding the pain and conflict behind her harsh sentiments.

“But you must understand, you are his brother,” Cangse Sanren continued, her voice softening slightly with a sigh. “He loves you deeply, enough to make such a sacrifice. Treasure his loyalty and love, and carry his core with pride and honor, just as he did when it was within him.”

In response, Jiang Wanyin bowed lower than usual, a gesture of respect and acceptance. “Thank you for your counsel, Cangse-qianbei. Rest assured, I will heed your words.”

Before the conversation could progress further, Baoshan Sanren interjected, “Well then, can I have your time to speak?”

“What is it that you want to speak, Immortal?” Lan Qiren inquired, his demeanor composed yet attentive.

“Since today's discussion revolves around golden cores, I have a surprise in store for you,” she announced as a talisman appeared, hovering over the palm of her hand, glowing red and gold at the same time. Recognizing it immediately, Wen Qing stepped forward, her expression tense with apprehension.

“Are you going to this here? In front of many people?!” she demanded, her voice edged with concern.

“Of course not. Let me finish first,” Baoshan Sanren replied, turning her attention to Cangse Sanren and Wei Changze. “Well, this surprise is specifically for the Wei Family.”

Wei Changze's brow furrowed, sensing the ominous undertone in Baoshan Sanren's smile, “What is it?” he inquired, his tone guarded.

“Let's just say I have the ability to restore Wei Wuxian to his prime.”

Chapter End Notes

I may have hinted at the spoiler being the 'golden core,' but in the closing moments of the chapter, I decided to offer the cultivators a sneak peek into what's to come before and during the golden core transfer. Don't worry; I'll provide a detailed explanation of the scene, striving to capture each character's reaction accurately because it was indeed a challenge for me to depict everyone's response to this pivotal moment, but I'm committed to improving.

And that's not all; in the next chapter, not only will everyone witness the core transfer, but they'll also witness Wei Wuxian's transformation into a stronger version of himself. So, stay tuned for more excitement!

On another note, I'm thrilled to share that our dance group clinched the championship in the competition, and I personally secured second place in the poetry competition. I'm feeling quite proud of these accomplishments and was inspired to complete this chapter as soon as the events concluded.

Thank you all for your patience and support! Have a wonderful day, and I look forward to seeing you in the next chapter!

Death Zone

Chapter Notes

> Hello everyone, I’m back at last! I apologize for the prolonged absence—I’m certain you’ve been concerned not only for the story but also for me. Now, I’m here, uploading another chapter. I hope this makes up for the delays, as I know it’s been a while since the last update.
>
> Enjoy reading!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“Let's just say I have the ability to restore Wei Wuxian to his prime.”

“What?” Cangse Sanren asked in utter confusion and shock.

“What do you mean, Grandmaster?” Wei Changze demanded, stepping protectively in front of his wife. The concept of core transfer was unimaginable—until recently. When Wen Qing presented her theory, the impossible suddenly seemed within reach.

Baoshan Sanren’s claim to restore their son to his prime left them teetering on the edge of hope and disbelief. What method would she employ? Another operation, perhaps? If so, where would she acquire a core? Their son’s core had been transferred to Jiang Wanyin. Or did she have another, inconceivable method? These possibilities went on raving in Wei Changze’s mind like a storm. Desperation clawed at him and his wife, driving their need to understand the immortal’s enigmatic plan.

“If you need a core, you can take mine—”

“A-Ze!” Cangse Sanren exclaimed, her voice tinged with disbelief and a trace of admiration. The realization that her husband was willing to sacrifice his own core left her momentarily stunned. She had entertained the same thought, but hearing him say it first was a shock.

“That’s not necessary, Wei Changze,” Baoshan Sanren interjected with a voice that carried both authority and a touch of weariness. “Your selflessness is commendable, but unnecessary. I understand the depth of your love and the lengths you would go to for your son. Such devotion is rare and admirable. Yet, I must decline your offer. I have encountered enough self-sacrificial acts in my time, and I’d rather avoid adding another to that list.”

Wei Changze lowered his gaze and clenched his fists.

Her gaze then softened as she continued, “There are other ways—ways that do not require such a personal sacrifice. Trust in the process I have devised.”

Baoshan Sanren’s tone conveyed not only her appreciation for Wei Changze’s offer but also her firm resolve to find a path forward that would not exact such a grave price.

“T-Then, can you share to us on what you will do?” Sizhui, with a mix of anxiety and shyness, inquired of the immortal. If the immortal possessed the ability to restore his senior Wei, to his prime, Sizhui earnestly desired it. He longed to witness the most formidable version of his Senior Wei.

“Sanren-Dàshī, could you please enlighten us?” Jingyi implored, his eyes brimming with hope and anticipation. Beside him, Zizhen, Jin Ling, and the other cultivators nodded in agreement, their curiosity piqued about the actions the immortals would take.

Lan Wangji gazed down at his unconscious husband, his expression a mix of love and turmoil. He knew Wei Ying would be less than pleased to wake up and find another core within him. Yet, in the depths of his heart, Lan Wangji couldn’t help but yearn for Wei Ying to be restored to his former glory. At the same time, he cherished the man Wei Ying had become, with all the trials and tribulations that had shaped him today. However, to say he was conflicted would be an understatement.

Wei Ying’s parents, driven by desperation and an unyielding love for their son, would undoubtedly embrace Baoshan Sanren’s plan, no matter what it was, all in the hope of Wei Ying’s recovery. Lan Wangji understood their feelings all too well. His own heart mirrored their desperation, yet it also harbored a fervent hope that the solution would not require a

sacrificial exchange. The thought of sacrifice hung heavy in his mind. If it came to that, he knew without a shadow of a doubt that he would step forward. For Wei Ying's sake, he would volunteer without hesitation. The prospect of such a sacrifice was daunting, but his love for Wei Ying was boundless, transcending even his own fears and desires.

"Alright, I'll explain," Baoshan Sanren began, the talisman hovering above her palm glowing with an intensified radiance that caused the cultivators to shield their eyes. "To avoid sacrificing someone's core, I thought of an alternative. Rather than taking another's core, why not attempt to replicate Wei Wuxian's younger self's core?"

The cultivators froze, their minds reeling. Could such a powerful talisman truly mimic a golden core?

"But golden cores dissipate the moment you extract them from their owner's body," Nie Huaisang countered, his voice tinged with skepticism. Baoshan Sanren turned her gaze to him, studying him intently before responding.

"Precisely, that is the primary challenge. Extracting a core is as arduous as extracting half of a person's soul. To prevent the core from dissipating, it must be sealed," Baoshan Sanren explained, allowing the weight of her words to settle in the charged air. "The talisman I have created makes this possible. By sealing it, the energy and the core itself remain intact."

Nie Huaisang furrowed his brow. "Even if sealing prevents dissipation, I'm certain a core can only be sealed while still within a person's body," he argued. Though he's not the most skilled cultivator, his studies of golden cores had been thorough.

Wen Qing then interjected, "That was my initial thought as well. But according to her, a core can indeed be sealed, whether inside or outside the body."

Lan Qiren's eyes widened in shock. "But that's just impossible," he said, his voice tinged with disbelief. Could it be that the Immortal had achieved this, and that her confidence in her plan was well-founded? "And pardon me for speaking, but attempting to replicate a golden core necessitates the presence of a physical body with an existing core to serve as the model. Wei Wuxian had his core before the fall of Lotus Pier, thus suggesting that one could imitate the core from his younger self is somewhat preposterous."

Baoshan Sanren met his gaze steadily. “Your doubts are understandable, Lan Qiren. The challenge lies in capturing the essence of a core that once was, and preserving its energy in a state of flux. My talisman does not merely seal; it maintains the resonance of the original core.”

The cultivators, initially filled with skepticism, began to sense the possibilities within her plan. Wen Qing, who witnessed what happened earlier, stayed silent. She really wants to believe that Baoshan Sanren will succeed.

“Sealing a core outside the body defies conventional wisdom,” Baoshan Sanren continued. “Yet, it is through such defiance that innovation arises. There’s also a talisman I have crafted which was designed to temporarily confine a core in a containment space to seal it and return it to its rightful owner.”

The room fell silent.

Baoshan Sanren had accomplished numerous extraordinary feats throughout her life as a cultivator. While her achievements might no longer surprise those familiar with her prowess, her ingenuity remained nothing short of astonishing. She crafted innovative talismans and expanded her understanding of cultivation through relentless exploration, embracing both conventional and unconventional, orthodox and unorthodox methods.

Her innovative spirit and profound wisdom set her apart as a truly remarkable cultivator, much like Wei Wuxian. Both possessed an insatiable curiosity and a fearless approach to breaking boundaries, redefining the limits of their art.

“Damn,” Jin Ling murmured in awe. Encountering such a powerful cultivator and hearing her explain her achievements inspired him to strive to become a better cultivator himself.

On the other hand, Jiang Wanyin was deeply conflicted. If he had encountered her, would the core transfer have been avoided? Would she be able to do what she said earlier? His mind swirled with a maelstrom of questions, and a surge of anger towards Baoshan Sanren welled up within him for not appearing on that mountain. Yet, who was he to harbor such resentment? The location of the celestial mountain had been shrouded in uncertainty, and

holding her accountable for not appearing in the past and revealing her plans now seemed unjust.

He’s conflicted; he’s guilty of having taken Wei Wuxian's core for granted and the dawning acceptance of it as his own. Jiang Wanyin's thoughts were a tangled web. He couldn't deny the power it gave him and the strength it had restored. But at what cost? The price had been too high, and the sacrifice bore heavily upon him. The core was his now, a part of him. He would honor it, not just as a gift from his brother but as a responsibility to carry forward. This was his path now, entwined with the legacy of Wei Wuxian, and he would walk it with the strength and resolve that core had given him.

Yet, even in acceptance, the bitterness lingered. A part of him would always yearn for what could have been, for the solutions that seemed just out of reach.

Right now, Baoshan Sanren’s declaration of restoring Wei Wuxian to his prime ignited a surge of hope within Jiang Wanyin. The thought of his brother returning even stronger than before filled him with a stirring excitement. Yet, amidst this hope, he couldn’t ignore the reality of the core now residing within him—the essence of Wei Wuxian himself. As he touched the spot where the core lay, he felt a tightening in his jaw.

‘Fuck,’ he thought bitterly, everything felt like chaos. Just what is he supposed to feel right now?

“Thanks to Wei Wuxian's time-travel talisman,” Baoshan Sanren revealed, her voice carrying a hint of marvel, "Wen Qing and I were transported back to the archery competition.”

Jiang Fengmian's curiosity sparked. “So, you encountered Wei Wuxian from the past?” he inquired, to which Baoshan Sanren nodded. She glanced at Wen Qing, who confirmed the account with a silent nod of her own.

“And that’s okay?!” Zizhen blurted out anxiously. His understanding of time travel, albeit limited, cautioned against interference between different eras. The implications of altering the past could ripple through time, impacting the future in unforeseen ways.

“Yes, it was okay. We didn’t really do anything other than talk to Wei Wuxian’s younger self,” Wen Qing responded instead. “Or more like Baoshan Sanren talk to him a bit.”

“That’s crazy,” Jin Zixuan muttered, his eyebrows shooting up in bewilderment.

“The other crazy thing in here is y’all being here,” Mianmian quipped, casting a wry glance at Jin Zixuan. She’s referring to everyone who was brought back in this timeline.

“Essentially, you and Wen Qing travelled back to the past, encountered Wei Wuxian, replicated his core, and returned to present this to us,” Lan Xichen remarked with a thoughtful furrow in his brow.

“Indeed, that sums it up,” Baoshan Sanren confirmed with a nod, her demeanor composed.

“But there’s still a question I have in mind,” Nie Huaisang said and Baoshan Sanren turned to him.

“What is it?” she asked.

"Considering the potential fusion of past Wei Wuxian's core and Mo Xuanyu’s core, what are the risks?" Nie Huaisang inquired with measured concern.

“Well, to answer your question, Sect Leader Nie, the outcome hinges on several critical factors,” Baoshan Sanren began, turning her back towards the cultivators. Then, above them, a projected image materialized, illustrating a demonstration of the forthcoming events.

“Firstly, the compatibility of the two cores would be crucial. Wei Wuxian's original core would need to harmonize with Mo Xuanyu's core. The fusion process would ideally blend their energies seamlessly, potentially enhancing Wei Wuxian's spiritual power. However, integrating Mo Xuanyu's weaker core with Wei Wuxian’s original core presents significant complexities. The disparity in their strengths poses a fundamental challenge to their seamless fusion. Additionally, Mo Xuanyu's core has been exposed to resentful energy, which could

compromise the purity of Prime Wei Wuxian's core. This contamination threatens to disrupt the delicate balance required for the fusion process to succeed harmoniously. If the fusion fails, there will be a clash between these two cores, which may lead to a Qi deviation."

"Q-Qi deviation?" Cangse Sanren whispered, her voice barely audible as shock-etched lines of concern etched on her face. She instinctively took a step back, her hand rising to cover her mouth in disbelief.

Qi deviation is dangerous because it disrupts the body's spiritual balance, leading to erratic and potentially harmful manifestations of spiritual energy. Left unchecked, it can cause physical illness, mental instability, permanent damage to the practitioner's spiritual cultivation, and even death.

"But didn't Wei Wuxian absorb considerable amounts of resentful energy in Biling Lake and in Gusu?" Madam Jin reminded them.

"Hmm, I do recall that incident," Lan Xichen murmured, thoughtfully placing his hand on his chin. "But it was an unconscious act, wasn't it?"

"Correct," Jiang Wanyin affirmed with a nod. "He did not intend for it to happen."

"Indeed, Wei Wuxian absorbed significant amounts of resentful energy in those moments, but it pales in comparison to the magnitude of what Mo Xuanyu did," Baoshan Sanren explained. "Mo Xuanyu harnessed resentful energy and executed an immensely powerful and dark ritual, one of Wei Wuxian's most dangerous innovations, to summon him back. The scale of the energy Mo Xuanyu wielded to perform the sacrificial ritual was unparalleled to what Wei Wuxian absorbed."

"That makes sense," Mianmian muttered, the realization dawning on her.

"So, Mo Xuanyu's core being exposed to such intense resentful energy," Xiao Xingchen's expression mirrored the gravity of the situation, concern furrowing his brow as he continued, "could seriously jeopardize the fusion and Wei Wuxian's life," he voiced, his worry evident.

Just hearing the word death made Lan Wangji tighten his embrace around his husband. No, his husband can’t die. He can’t! He just got him back. He...

“Not only did Mo Xuanyu perform a powerful ritual, but after Senior Wei returned, he continuously used resentful energy in battles,” Sizhui remarked, his expression troubled as he recalled their experiences in Yi City. “I also remember he performed the summoning of painted eyes.”

“Oh, I remember that,” Zizhen chimed in, his eyes lighting up. “It was so impressive!”

Jiang Yanli, her anxiety evident, voiced the question that echoed in all their minds. "What should we do?" Her hands clasped together in a gesture of deep concern for her beloved younger brother.

“We must purify Mo Xuanyu’s core to eliminate the taint of resentful energy before attempting the fusion,” Baoshan Sanren explained. “This approach will reduce the risk of contamination and help achieve the necessary spiritual purity for a successful fusion.”

“Are there any risks involved in purifying the resentful energy?” Wei Changze inquired.

“Yes,” Baoshan Sanren affirmed. “While the removal of resentful energy could potentially destabilize Wei Wuxian's cultivation base due to his partial reliance on it, such an outcome is improbable. Wei Wuxian has already achieved mastery over resentful energy; should he lose some of his cultivation power, he possesses the capability to relearn and reestablish it. The responsibility lies with him to maintain a balance between resentful and spiritual energies.”

“God, there’s so much risks present here,” Jin Zixuan whispered.

“Moreover, we must rely on Wei Wuxian's willingness to accept the core. If he can accept it, then all we can do is wait and see if the fusion succeeds. That's why I seek your permission as well, because this operation carries substantial risk,” Baoshan Sanren cautioned, her gaze earnestly fixed on Cangse Sanren, Wei Changze, and Lan Wangji.

“What are the chances of success for this operation?” Cangse Sanren inquired, her voice tinged with concern.

Baoshan Sanren paused thoughtfully before responding. "Well," she began slowly, choosing her words with care. "The outcome is uncertain. While the talisman I've crafted offers a promising framework, the ultimate efficacy depends on Wei Wuxian's acceptance and the delicate orchestration of the fusion process."

Cangse Sanren exchanged a glance with Wei Changze, silently grappling with the weight of their decision. Lan Wangji's stoic expression betrayed the turmoil within as he considered the potential consequences for Wei Wuxian.

Baoshan Sanren addressed the group with a composed demeanor, “We can proceed with the operation once the next memory concludes, so I am giving you ample time to reflect on your decision.” As she spoke, the talisman in her hand vanished into thin air, along with the projected image. She continued, her tone growing somber, “The next memory will be far worse than those you have seen thus far. You will witness a great deal of suffering, so brace yourselves. All of you, except for Wei Wuxian, will experience it first-hand. You will come to understand the trials Wei Wuxian endured before he was branded the enemy of the cultivation world.”

Madam Lan, her voice barely above a whisper, trembled as she asked, “There's still more?”

Nie Mingjue, pondering aloud, questioned, “What could be worse than the core transfer?” His words echoed the unspoken fears of Jiang Wanyin and Lan Wangji, whose thoughts immediately converged on a single, dreaded term...

‘The Burial Mounds.’

For three agonizing months, Wei Wuxian had endured unspeakable horrors in that forsaken place. Though he never divulged the full extent of his experiences during those months, the mere fact of his survival spoke volumes. Lan Wangji understood that ‘bad’ was a woefully inadequate term to describe the ordeal. A more fitting description would be a waking nightmare.

The Burial Mounds were notorious, a place where no one had ever emerged alive. Crossing its borders was tantamount to courting death, yet Wei Wuxian had not only stepped into this realm of despair and horror but had also managed to endure its dark energies, sought to break the mind and spirit. This feat alone shows his unyielding resolve. However, his survival was not merely a reflection of his strength; it was also a grim testament to the relentless trials and suffering he had faced.

In the past, and until now, Lan Wangji often found himself haunted by the silent agony etched into Wei Wuxian's eyes, the haunted look of someone who had glimpsed the abyss and emerged, irrevocably changed. It made him scared, not to him, but for him, but from now on, he'll always be there for him, to be his resting place, his solace, his home.

The cultivators then braced themselves for the revelation, a sense of foreboding settled over them, knowing that what they were about to witness would irrevocably alter their perception of Wei Wuxian's past and the burdens he carried.

"The memory will continue now."

A scenery of a mountain appeared, and below them were Wei Wuxian and Jiang Wanyin, staring up as if they were searching for something hidden within the mist-covered peaks.

"Is this really where Baoshan Sanren lives?" Jiang Wanyin asked, staring up at a steep path.

A lot of cultivators frowned. Based on the environment and wildlife there, it looked like they were somewhere near Yiling. Wei Wuxian obviously led Jiang Wanyin to a desolate mountain. And Baoshan Sanren and Cangse Sanren's expression confirmed that Wei Wuxian had indeed deceived Jiang Wanyin.

Well, both were desperate for solutions, so caring about lying to the other seemed insignificant compared to the urgency of finding a remedy for their dire situation.

From behind Jiang Wanyin, Wei Wuxian began to laugh in a reassuring manner and replied, “This is certainly her dwelling place. Why do you continue to doubt me?”

‘Because we are aware of the truth, Senior Wei,’ Sizhui thought, maintaining a sad smile.

“Why would I deceive you? To have you experience fleeting happiness only to face a greater disappointment later? That’s not my intention,” Wei Wuxian said decisively. “Come here, and allow me to cover your eyes.”

“Cover your eyes?” Jiang Fengmian inquired with a raised eyebrow. “Why is it necessary to cover his eyes?”

“Well,” Jiang Wanyin began. “You’ll find out soon, A-Die.”

Yu Ziyuan, who had been silent, responded with a nonchalant hum.

Jiang Wanyin turned to allow Wei Wuxian to bind a cloth around his head, obscuring his vision. Wei Wuxian then handed him a walking stick.

“Proceed slowly,” he instructed. “There are no beasts in this area, so you should be safe. Remember, you must not remove the blindfold, even if you stumble. It is essential to follow this rule strictly. We must not displease the grandmaster or the other seniors. Adhere to their instructions without exception, alright?”

Wei Wuxian spoke with such conviction that anyone would believe he possessed genuine knowledge about the immortal and the dangers of the mountain. Those who wanted to know more about the immortal and her celestial mountain would really seek Wei Wuxian's counsel, perhaps even offering compensation for his insights. This situation is made all the more sad considering that Wei Wuxian must go to great lengths to keep his true intentions hidden from Jiang Wanyin, even if it necessitates deceit.

Clearing his throat, Wei Wuxian concluded, “And don’t forget the most important part. If you’re asked who you are, you have to say that you’re the son of Cangse Sanren. You can’t reveal your true identity.”

“Okay!”

Yu Ziyuan flinched slightly, momentarily enraged by the prospect of her son claiming Cangse Sanren as his mother. She glanced at Cangse Sanren, who appeared indifferent to Jiang Cheng’s assertion of being her child, her focus remaining solely on Wei Wuxian. Yu Ziyuan then turned her attention to the unconscious Wei Wuxian, resting comfortably in Lan Wangji’s arms. After a moment of contemplation, her anger subsided.

If Jiang Cheng were to assert himself as Wei Wuxian, it would mean that Wei Wuxian would be unable to seek any future assistance from Baoshan Sanren, who would likely doubt his true identity.

Wei Wuxian had sacrificed his only opportunity for a miracle on behalf of her son.

“Foolish, foolish boy,” she murmured, her voice betraying a tone of gratitude despite her frustration.

Wei Wuxian reached forward, then hesitated, his hand hovering just above Jiang Cheng. After a moment’s pause, he forced himself to move again, squeezing his brother’s shoulder and giving him a little push up the trail.

“Go ahead. You’ll need to finish the journey on your own. I’ll wait for you at the foot of the mountain.”

Jiang Wanyin nodded once, then began walking up the path.

While the majority of observers were focused on Jiang Wanyin, Lan Wangji's attention was directed at Wei Wuxian's changing expressions. As Jiang Wanyin ascended further up the

mountain, Wei Wuxian's face exhibited a whirlwind of emotions, each fleeting and difficult to discern.

This was it. Everything was going downhill at this very moment.

A sudden flash forward revealed a desolate peak, shrouded in the veil of dusk, a lone figure stood silhouetted against the fading light. Clad in black from head to toe, with only the hint of a straw hat adorning her head. A black cloth draped over her face concealed her identity, veiling her features in shadow as she surveyed the scenery with a watchful gaze. Her gaze then fixed on Jiang Wanyin, who was walking in a seemingly aimless manner.

Then, he heard chimes of a bell. He immediately stopped and looked around, and when the chimes stopped, a tip of a sword was pointed to his chest.

Wen Qing, her face obscured by a black veil, responded with a firm tone, “Stop. Who are you? Why have you come to this mountain?”

Wen Qing’s current self was gripped by tension, her fists clenched tightly. Is she going to be relive this moment, haunted by the tormenting screams she had heard before? The thought was unbearable; she does not want any of this!

Jiang Wanyin, taken aback by the presence of someone—specifically, the immortal—on the mountain, quickly identified himself. “I am Wei Ying, son of Cangse Sanren.”

“Cangse Sanren?” Wen Qing echoed, seeking clarification.

“Yes,” Jiang Wanyin confirmed.

Wen Qing then inquired, “What is the son of Cangse Sanren doing on this mountain?”

Jiang Wanyin, bowing his head in a gesture of both respect and urgency, explained, "My sect was met with tragedy, cruelly annihilated. With my golden core destroyed, I am powerless to avenge them. I beg shizun* to help restore my golden core!"

If the cultivators were Jiang Wanyin, they would really be convinced that he's speaking with the immortal right now.

"Good acting, Wen-guniang," Nie Huaisang remarked, drawing an immediate, sharp glare from Wen Qing.

"What sect are you from?" Wen Qing inquired. "What caused the demise of your sect? Was Cangse Sanren part of that sect as well?"

Jiang Wanyin responded meticulously, choosing his words with great care to avoid any mistake. However, as he was in the midst of answering her questions, he detected a faint aroma in the air and then abruptly lost consciousness.

The memory quikly shifted, presenting an image of Jiang Wanyin unconscious in Wen Ning's arms, with Wen Qing observing him intently.

Wen Ning looked up at his sister with evident concern and asked, "Jie, will he wake up?"

Seeing Jiang Wanyin lying unconscious in Wen Ning's arms made Jiang Yanli anxious. She was about to witness the operation unfold in real-time. Although she was confident in the operation's eventual success, it did not alleviate her worry about the process itself, which was bound to be fraught with potential complications.

Wen Qing's response was subdued and somber. "He won't," she said softly, removing her hat to reveal a face marked by a profound solemnity. She then turned her gaze toward a nearby tree and commanded, "Come out."

Wei Wuxian then came out of his hiding spot, walking towards Wen Qing, multiple emotions flashing in his face.

Cangse Sanren and Wei Changze's hearts shattered as they observed the shifting emotions on their son's face. It was distressing to witness the transition from the once-playful and mischievous glint in his eyes to one of loss and resignation. Their son's unwavering loyalty and sense of duty, while undeniably both a source of great strength and an inherent weakness, elicited a mixture of heartache and pride. Despite the relentless pain of seeing him endure such suffering, they felt an overwhelming sense of pride. Their son stood apart from others; he was not merely unique, but embodyingly strong and resolute.

They just hoped that everything will be okay, that the operation would be successful.

Conversely, he felt an overwhelming sense of loss and sorrow. The core represented a critical part of his identity and power. The sacrifice signified not only the loss of his strength but also a part of himself. He's also experiencing a mix of regret and acceptance. Regret the circumstances that led to this extreme measure and the potential repercussions for his future. Acceptance came from recognizing the inevitability of his choices and the need to face the consequences with resolve.

However, on one hand, there was a sense of determination and purpose. He still wanted to ensure his safety and success, and this decision was driven by a commitment to rectify past mistakes and protect those he cared about. The sacrifice of his core, though a significant personal loss, was a necessary act of redemption and selflessness.

"Redemption? Past mistakes?" Qingheng-jun frowned. "Again, what mistakes has he made? What redemption is necessary when he has not committed any crime?"

Yu Ziyuan flinched once again at Qingheng-jun's indirect question. She had numerous reasons and answers to his inquiries, yet voicing them seemed almost impossible. The weight of Wei Wuxian's sacrifice was slowly, gradually sinking in, filling her with a sense of remorse.

As she recalled how she had instilled such a mindset in Wei Wuxian, a wave of guilt washed over her. She had always emphasized the importance of ensuring her son's safety, convincing Wei Wuxian that it was his utmost responsibility. Now, as she witnessed the consequences of

this belief, she felt a deep, gnawing sense of horror. Yes, her son was relatively safe, but what about Wei Wuxian? His selfless act had left him exposed to all manner of dangers, and the burden of this reality weighed heavily on her conscience. Who would bear the blame for his vulnerability now? The answer was painfully clear…

She would.

Yu Ziyuan clenched her fists, her inner turmoil evident. Jiang Fengmian noticed her distress and gently tried to hold her hand, offering a small measure of comfort in the midst of her emotional struggle.

"I agree," Mianmian murmured softly, ensuring her voice was low enough that Yu Ziyuan would not hear her.

“Let’s begin,” Wei Wuxian declared.

All of the cultivators took a deep breath, their hearts beating rapidly.

Wen Ning turned to Wei Wuxian and asked once more, “Wei-gongzi, why don’t you consider this?”

Wei Wuxian, touched by Wen Ning's concern, chuckled softly and replied, “It's not a serious matter. Even without my golden core, I am still Wei Wuxian.”

“Nothing serious?!” Jiang Wanyin exclaimed, his anger flaring at the thought that Wei Wuxian was treating the situation lightly. However, deep down, he understood that Wei Wuxian was, in fact, deeply serious and anxious, merely masking his true emotions as he always did.

“Senior Wei,” the disciples chorused, their voices filled with sadness and distress.

“Why is he like this?” Jin Ling whispered, his hands clenched into fists. He could admit to feeling both angry and worried for Wei Wuxian, but it frustrated him that Wei Wuxian couldn’t be honest about his true feelings in this moment. Everyone needed to see his sincerity.

“This… how can this be the same?!” Wen Ning argued, his body shaking, “You’re not like me. You have great spiritual energy and extraordinary talent! In the future, you could be a master cultivator! If you don’t have your golden core, don’t even talk of regular cultivation. You won’t be able to wield your sword anymore!”

What Wen Ning said was undeniably true. In hindsight, everything about Wei Wuxian not carrying his sword prior to and during the Sunshot Campaign now made perfect sense. This realization forced everyone to reflect on their actions and attitudes towards him.

However, even as they reflected, a pressing question loomed: what comes next? Seeking forgiveness might be an option, but the damage had already been done. Wei Wuxian's reputation had been irreparably tarnished the moment he was deemed dangerous and accused of using unorthodox cultivation methods. Although his reputation had somewhat improved, a lingering unease still permeated among cultivators and civilians alike when he’s near. He is still regarded as a dangerous man.

With the stark truth now confronting them, all they could do was grapple with their remorse and the weight of their collective guilt.

Wei Wuxian sighed, ignoring Wen Ning’s words and turned to Wen Qing, declaring, “Wen-guniang, hurry up and start. Jiang Wanyin is still waiting.”

He then proceeds to lie down to the ground next to Jiang Wanyin.

“Once I begin cutting out your core, the pain will be excruciating,” Wen Qing said bluntly as she prepares her tools. “Also, you must remain conscious. Are you prepared for that?”

“Wait, what do you mean remain conscious?” Cangse Sanren demanded, clutching her chest in horror. She really did not want to assume anything, but if she were correct, then… “What do you mean?!”

Wen Qing could feel the headache forming in her head. She couldn’t answer her, so instead, she said, “It will be explained.”

Wei Wuxian replied with a determined, “Yes.”

“Wei-gongzi!” Wen Ning exclaimed.

Wen Qing pulled out a blade, warning him, "Bear with it," before stabbing Wei Wuxian in the stomach.

"Ahhh!"

The cultivators gasped loudly in shock and horror. Lan Wangji closed his eyes, unable to bear the sight.

"Wait, wait! What about anesthesia?!" Jingyi screamed, now fully distressed. "You need to numb him first!"

"What is going on?!"

Wei Wuxian continued to scream in agony as Wen Qing made the incision.

The cultivators were paralyzed with a mixture of disbelief and terror, unable to reconcile the brutal reality unfolding before them with their understanding of medical practice.

The scene was too much for many; some turned away, while others watched in morbid fascination, unable to tear their eyes away despite the gruesome spectacle. The necessity of performing the procedure without anesthesia eluded many in their shock. This gruesome, excruciatingly painful process all too much to everyone.

Some began to cry, like Jiang Yanli and Cangse Sanren. While stabbing someone was not unique in the cultivation world, witnessing such brutal act, especially on a beloved individual, was something else. The emotional weight of the moment was evident, rendering the atmosphere heavy with shared grief and silent prayers for Wei Wuxian's survival.

'I don't even have a golden core. I can never form a core in this lifetime! How am I supposed to take revenge?!' Jiang Wanyin's voice echoed in Wei Wuxian's mind.

'It hurts! It hurt so much!' **Wei Wuxian screamed in his mind, tears streaming down his face.**

Lan Wangji's heart shattered into a million pieces. It was too painful, too unbearable. He pulled his husband into a tight embrace.

"Wei Ying... Wei Ying," he whispered, his voice choked with tears.

'Wei Ying,' Wen Qing began. 'About the core transfer, I can only guarantee a fifty percent chance of success.'

'Baoshan Sanren will have a way, right?' Jiang Wanyin asked, anticipation brimming in his eyes.

"Arghhhh! Ahhhh!!"

Cangse Sanren's anguished cry pierced the air as she fell to her knees, her face streaked with tears. She shut her eyes tightly, pressing her hands over her ears in a desperate attempt to

block out the unbearable sounds of her son's suffering. "Stop this! Please, stop this now!" she pleaded.

"A-Se," Wei Changze's voice trembled as he called to his wife, his own tears mingling with hers. He knelt beside her, wrapping his arms around her in a desperate embrace. The sight of their son enduring such intense pain was unbearable. Their son's pain and sacrifice, and the fact that it might not yet be over, left him feeling useless and helpless.

"A-Ying," he spoke softly, his voice trembling, "You can do this."

'Even without a core, I will have other ways to live,' Wei Wuxian spoke with such conviction. 'But Jiang Cheng won't be able to.'

'You idiot, how could you say that so confidently?' Jiang Cheng thought, feeling a sharp pang of guilt and sorrow, and tears forming in the corner of his eyes. Wei Wuxian still believed in his ability to survive and adapt without a core? Hah! No one has been able to until he was born.

However, the stark reality behind Wei Wuxian's statement pierced Jiang Cheng's pride. The truth was undeniable: without his golden core, he's nothing more than an empty vessel, fragile and easily shattered. His strength, his identity, utterly dependent on that core. So, scolding Wei Wuxian about his mindset was hypocritical of him.

'Uncle Jiang!' He called out, running towards Jiang Fengmian with a huge smile on his face. 'I've learned this sword move! Take a look!'

Jiang Fengmian's eyes widened when he saw the memory, and his heart constrict. The realization that despite everything, Wei Wuxian still thinks of him. And now, here he is, sacrificing his core for his son.

'Wei Ying, I'm sorry. I promise to change myself from now on. Don't forgive me, but allow me to make amends of the gaps and mistakes I made in the past,' he thought as he stared at the unconscious Wei Wuxian. He promises to speak what's in his mind to Wei Wuxian later.

Wei Wuxian then demonstrated the move he learned to Jiang Fengmian and to the Jiang disciples.

'How amazing!'

'Do it again, Da-shixiong!'

'Da-shixiong is too good!'

"His life is literally flashing before his eyes," Jin Zixuan's heart raced with mounting anxiety as he witnessed Wei Wuxian's suffering.

Jiang Yanli, her hands tightly clasped together in a gesture of desperation, murmured, "He can't die. Not A-Xian…"

Jin Ling, though tears streamed down his face, forced himself to hold back his sobs. "He won't die, A-Niang," he asserted with a shaky voice, his determination barely masking his own terror. The strain of the situation threatened to overwhelm him, yet he wanted to stay strong. He believed fervently in Wei Wuxian's resilience and the success of the operation. "He won't."

Meanwhile, Wei Wuxian's vision blurred increasingly, a combination of tears and the encroaching darkness of unconsciousness clouding his sight. The persistent ringing in his ears only heightened his sense of disorientation.

Desperation edged into Wen Qing's voice as she urged, "Wei Wuxian, you must stay awake! You cannot afford to lose consciousness now!" Her distress was evident as she struggled to keep him awake.

'You're A-Ying, aren't you? Here, I'll take you home.'

Jiang Fengmian clenched his jaw and fists, his mind racing back to the day he found Wei Wuxian on the streets, a small, lost boy with eyes full of innocence and vulnerability. Seeing Wei Wuxian now, enduring such unbearable pain, brought a surge of emotions to the surface —sorrow for the suffering and a sense of helplessness. He remembered the promise he made to himself that day, to protect this child as his own, to give him a life free of fear and hardship. The scene before him was a cruel mockery of that promise, and it tore at his heart to see the boy he had come to love as a son now facing such torment.

'I'm terrible,' he admitted in his mind. *'I'm truly a terrible father, and I'm so sorry Wei Ying.'*

Wei Wuxian let out a sharp gasp and gagged, blood seeping from his mouth as he managed to utter, "Continue!"

Wen Qing, resolute, drove the knife deeper, prompting another wrenching cry from Wei Wuxian. Observing this scene with mounting horror, Wen Ning turned to his sister with urgent concern. "Jie, he's on the verge of losing consciousness again!"

"Keep him conscious!"

"But, jie!" Wen Ning's voice cracked with anxiety and panic, "Why won't anesthesia work?!"

Wen Qing, her voice strained yet firm, responded, "Wei Wuxian must stay awake throughout the procedure. Administering anesthesia could jeopardize the core's removal process."

The weight of her words hit Wen Ning hard, sending a shiver through his body. Despite his shock, he had no choice but to follow his sister's command, knowing that the success of the operation—and perhaps Wei Wuxian's survival—hinged on his actions.

"Why won't anesthesia work? Please explain in detail," Wei Changze pleaded at Wen Qing.

Wen Qing then went on to explain, “The removal of a golden core involves precise manipulation of spiritual energy. Wei Wuxian's active participation in directing and controlling his own energy is crucial to avoid disrupting the delicate balance of his spiritual pathways. Being awake allows him to respond to my instructions and adjust his energy flow accordingly. Also, the connection between the spiritual and physical aspects of the body is vital during the removal of a golden core. Anesthesia could disrupt this synchronization, leading to potential harm or failure of the procedure.”

“When did you have time to discover that?” Cangse Sanren asked, tears still streaming down her face.

“Two days before we went to the mountain,” Wen Qing replied. “I had begun preparations to ensure the operation would be as painless as possible. However, as I was progressing, I identified several risks and attempted to dissuade Wei Wuxian from proceeding. Unfortunately, he is utterly stubborn.”

“Then,” Cangse Sanren swallowed hard, bracing herself for the answer to her next question. “How long did the procedure take?”

“Two nights and a day,” Wen Ning answered in place of his sister, noting her visible distress. “He remained conscious throughout the entire duration.”

“Two nights and a day?!” Cangse Sanren exclaimed, her voice tinged with disbelief.

“And conscious throughout,” Nie Mingjue said, struggling to grasp the full extent of the situation. Pain, while not uncommon in the cultivation world as part of the growth process, is typically treated by various means. However, enduring such agony while remaining fully awake for over forty-eight hours was unprecedented and nearly incomprehensible. The sheer fortitude required for such an ordeal was astounding, and the inability to administer anesthesia only compounded the severity of the situation. He could only feel a mixture of pity, guilt, and reluctant admiration for Wei Wuxian's extraordinary endurance.

“I can’t believe this,” Madam Jin mumbled, staring at Wei Wuxian on the screen, then the current Wei Wuxian.

The siblings' cries echoed through the mountain, their anguish evident as the operation took a turn for the worse.

“Don’t sleep, Wei Wuxian, please!”

“I’m fine! K-Keep going, Wen Qing!” Wei Wuxian commanded. Despite the searing pain, his voice remained resolute.

“Ahhhhh!”

The agonizing cries of Wei Wuxian persisted, with Wen Ning at his side, doing everything in his power to keep Wei Wuxian conscious. He spoke to him soothingly, ensuring that Wei Wuxian remained aware of his presence throughout the two day operation. After all the excruciating pain and unyielding resolve, Wen Qing finally succeeded in extracting the golden core.

The golden core, now removed, was pulsating with immense energy, its vibrant aura reflecting the vast spiritual power it once contained.

Once again, the sight of the golden core was intimidating. It shimmered with a life of its own, a living embodiment of the cultivation that Wei Wuxian had achieved.

“It’s so…”

“Bright and... powerful,” another voice murmured, filled with both admiration and a hint of fear.

One cultivator, eyes wide with a mixture of awe and envy, whispered to another, “I’ve seen his core in the previous memory, but still, I've never seen anything like it. The sheer power… to think that this was within him all along.”

Another nodded solemnly, his gaze fixed on the core. “It’s terrifying, really. The amount of cultivation required to achieve something like this… it’s almost unimaginable. No wonder he was so formidable.”

Wen Qing carefully prepared for the next phase of the operation: transferring the golden core to Jiang Wanyin.

The core, now suspended between the two brothers, glowed brighter, its energy beginning to synchronize with Jiang Wanyin's spiritual flow. Every movement was deliberate, every breath measured. Wen Qing’s hands moved with a surgeon's precision, guiding the golden core into its new host.

Jiang Wanyin's body initially resisted the foreign energy, his spiritual meridians trembling under the strain of the powerful core. Wen Qing's voice was steady as she directed the energy, ensuring that the core would not overwhelm him. The process was delicate. One wrong move could result in irreversible damage to Jiang Wanyin’s spiritual foundation.

The Jiang family was a portrait of silent turmoil. Jiang Yanli trembled, her body betraying the overwhelming fear that had seized her heart. Across the room, Jiang Fengmian stood rigid, his fists and jaw clenched with such force that his prayers to the heavens seemed almost physical, as if sheer will alone could ensure his son's survival. Yu Ziyuan bit her lower lip, her intense gaze never leaving the Wen siblings as they worked. Despite the current state of Jiang Wanyin serving as undeniable proof of the operation's success, any misstep, however small, ignited her anxiety like a fresh wound.

"How long has it been since the surgery began?" an unfamiliar cultivator whispered, unable to mask their curiosity.

"Don't ask me," the person beside them muttered, their voice thick with dread. "I don’t even want to know."

As days bled into nights and the operation stretched on, the relentless passage of time took its toll. Fatigue weighed heavily on the siblings, their once-sharp eyes now rimmed

with exhaustion. Their hands, once steady with precision, now trembled with every incision. Each breath they drew felt fragile, quivering as it fought to steady nerves worn thin by the unrelenting demands of the surgery.

On the final day of the surgery, Wei Wuxian finally was able to breath. Though breathing was a bit painful because of the incision and his voice was strained due to screaming in pain. Wen Qing made sure to elevate Wei Wuxian's pain and gave him medicinal herb for his throat and incision.

"Wei-gongzi," Wen Ning's voice was soft, barely more than a whisper, as he gently shifted to support Wei Wuxian, allowing him to lean against his shoulder. The weight of the world seemed to press down on Wei Wuxian, his body sagging into the offered support. In response, Wei Wuxian let out a heavy sigh, a sound laden with exhaustion, as though even the mere act of speaking was too much for him at this moment.

Lan Wangji stood motionless, overwhelmed by a whirlwind of emotions as he cradled Wei Wuxian's unconscious form in his arms. The intensity of his feelings left him in a trance-like state, unable to fully grasp the flood of thoughts crashing within. Wen Ning had warned him beforehand: the chances of the operation succeeding were only fifty percent. Even then, the mere thought of such odds had unsettled him. He could barely fathom what Wei Wuxian had endured.

But now, having witnessed it all, a singular question lingered in Lan Wangji's mind: why? Why does Wei Wuxian possess such kindness, such selflessness, and an almost unfathomable capacity for love? Why does he remain loyal to a household that scarcely acknowledges his worth, let alone returns his devotion? It defied reason, the way Wei Wuxian gave so much of himself—his heart, his soul—for people who had offered him so little in return. Lan Wangji could not understand this, though he longed to. How could one man bear so much, give so freely, and expect nothing in return, despite the betrayal and loss?

In the stillness of the moment, Lan Wangji's heart ached not only for Wei Wuxian but also for the cruel injustice that lay hidden beneath his gentle exterior. His loyalty, his empathy, his relentless resolve—it all spoke to a soul more selfless and compassionate than most could even comprehend. And yet, it was those very virtues that had condemned him to suffering.

Lan Wangji turned his gaze toward Jiang Wanyin, his eyes narrowing as they fixed upon the spot where Wei Wuxian's golden core once resided, and thoughts surged through his mind,

each one sharp with quiet indignation, *‘He does not deserve it.’*

Lan Wangji’s heart simmered with quiet resentment.

“Stop glaring at me, Lan Wangji. I know you're angry,” Jiang Wanyin’s voice broke the tense silence, laced with reluctant resignation. “But know this: I will carry this core with pride, and I will forever be grateful for Wei Wuxian’s sacrifice, even though I never asked for it. I admit, I was in denial at first. Even now, despite witnessing everything, a part of me still struggles to accept it. But if Wei Wuxian offered me a chance at a miracle, then it’s only right for me to accept it.”

Lan Wangji’s gaze burned with restrained anger, his voice a low, “A miracle? You speak of it as though it were some gift bestowed upon you, as if you had the right to accept it. You speak of pride and gratitude, but do you truly understand what Wei Wuxian sacrificed for you?!”

Jiang Wanyin’s jaw tightened, but before he could respond, Lan Wangji’s anger spilled over, “He severed a part of himself, his soul for your sake! And what did you do in return? You turned your back on him the moment the world began to judge him. When he needed you most, you abandoned him. You left him to bear the weight of his suffering alone!”

Jiang Wanyin's face darkened, his expression steeling under the weight of Lan Wangji’s accusations. “How am I to blame for a sacrifice I never consented to?” he retorted, his voice laced with bitterness. “Do you think he is the only one who has sacrificed his life for another? I fought just as hard to save him, so why does your anger fall on me?!” His words grew sharper, tinged with frustration. “Do you think I haven't borne the weight of this guilt for all these years? I never asked for this core, and I certainly never wanted it! But it is mine now, and while I may never fully comprehend the cost of what was given, I cannot change the past!"

Lan Wangji’s eyes flared with fury, ready to unleash a retort, but before he could, he felt the gentle yet firm touch of Madam Lan’s hand on his shoulder, redirecting his attention.

“A-Zhan, that’s enough,” Madam Lan said softly but with authority. “You’re hurting Wei Wuxian.”

Lan Wangji's gaze immediately dropped, realizing with a start that his grip on Wei Wuxian's arms had tightened, unconsciously digging into his skin. Guilt surged through him as he saw how his own emotions had caused harm. Without hesitation, he began channeling his energy into Wei Wuxian, easing the pressure and healing the forming bruises.

"I will apologize on Wangji's behalf," Qingheng-jun interjected, his tone calm but commanding. Lan Wangji's head snapped up, his disbelief evident. The words he had spoken were not born from rashness, but conviction—he did not regret them. Yet his father continued. "That said, I do understand the place from which his anger stems," Qingheng-jun added, his gaze shifting to the Jiang family. "So, I ask that the Jiang family overlook this incident and allow my son a reprieve."

"Of course, Qingheng-jun," Jiang Fengmian responded before Yu Ziyuan can. "In truth, I do not take offense at his outburst. He has every right to feel the way he does, just as my son has had to bear the sacrifice he never asked for. Both Wei Wuxian and Jiang Cheng have made choices."

Cangse Sanren and Wei Changze stood silently at the sidelines, watching the scene unfold with solemn expressions. Although they had cried their hearts out for the suffering their son had endured, they couldn't deny a glimmer of appreciation for Lan Wangji's fierce anger. His rage was, in a way, comforting to them, it truly shows his affection and devotion to Wei Wuxian. It was a bittersweet revelation—they were grateful that someone cherished their son so deeply, yet an undeniable sadness gnawed at them, reminding them of their absence during the moments when Wei Wuxian had needed them the most.

Seven days later, the scene changed. Wei Wuxian sat perched on a rock, his exhaustion palpable. Dark circles marred his sunken eyes, and his skin had taken on a ghastly pallor, making him appear as fragile as paper. The fatigue was evident; he seemed barely able to keep himself upright.

Madam Jin was taken aback. "Wait, a whole week has passed since then?" she blurted, disoriented by the sudden time leap. The progression of events left her uneasy. However, as a mother herself, something deep within stirred, a protective instinct ignited by the sight of Wei Wuxian's pitiable state. It was as if she wanted nothing more than to reach into the memory and help him as much as she can.

Xiao Xingchen, too, shared in the concern. “He looks as though he could collapse at any moment,” he observed, his tone laden with worry. Wei Wuxian’s current appearance reminded him painfully of Jiang Wanyin during his time without a core, but this time, the circumstances seemed even more dire.

Nie Mingjue crossed his arms, frowning as he tried to process what he was seeing. “I’m surprised he’s managed to hold out for this long,” he remarked, before turning to Wen Qing with a question that weighed on his mind. “Has he had any rest since then?”

Wen Qing nodded, but there was a heaviness in her voice. “He did rest, but… you know how stubborn he is. He never knows when to stop.”

Nie Mingjue exhaled deeply, his concern evident.

Beside him, his brother Nie Huaisang remained quiet, his gaze intently fixed on the memory. From the surroundings, he deduced that Wei Wuxian was likely waiting at the base of the mountain for Jiang Wanyin. However, an unsettling feeling began to creep over him. There was something ominous about the scene, an inexplicable sense of foreboding that made him uneasy. Despite his efforts to dismiss it as overthinking, he couldn’t quite shake the feeling that something terrible was about to happen.

‘I just hope Jiang-xiong arrives soon,’ he thought anxiously.

As Wei Wuxian began tracing yet another circle into the dirt, a sudden, sharp crack reverberated through the air, instantly breaking the silence in the forest.

Every cultivator in the room snapped to attention, their senses immediately heightened.

Nie Huaisang cursed inwardly. He shouldn’t have tempted fate. Damn it.

“Who's there?!” Jiang Wanyin barked, his eyes darting around, scanning for any sign of movement. He knew it wasn’t him—he had been anxiously searching for later on, only to

find no trace of him. Now, someone— or something—was drawing near him.

“Wen Chao!” Lan Wangji's voice cut through the tension, a low hiss laced with barely restrained fury.

Jiang Yanli gasped, turning sharply toward Lan Wangji as if to seek confirmation. “Wen Chao?! Are you certain?”

Lan Wangji nodded gravely. “Wen Chao... he boasted of capturing Wei Ying when he was at his most vulnerable, and—” his voice faltered, trembling with barely contained rage. The rest of the sentence hung in the air, unsaid yet deeply understood by all. For those who knew what Lan Wangji could not bring himself to utter, fists tightened and jaws clenched in shared fury.

“Damn it!” Jiang Wanyin cursed as he played with zidian in his finger.

“What?” Wei Changze's voice rang out, demanding answers. His piercing gaze locked onto Lan Wangji. “What is Wen Chao planning to do, Lan Wangji?” His voice trembled with a mixture of desperation and dread.

“He’s going to—”

“It’s best to say nothing and let them witness it for themselves,” Baoshan Sanren interjected sharply, silencing Lan Wangji with a commanding gaze that left no room for argument.

As if on cue, the air grew thick with tension. The sound of Wei Wuxian’s breath quickened, each inhalation more ragged than the last. His chest heaved erratically, and the dark circles under his eyes only deepened, giving him the haunting appearance of a creature driven to the edge, desperate and cornered.

Then, from behind him, there was a swift movement—so fast it was almost imperceptible.

A hand slammed into Wei Wuxian's chest with brutal force.

"Shit!" Jin Zixuan cursed under his breath, his hand moving as he instinctively reached for his sword, only to realize that he did not have it with him.

"Wen Zhuliu?!" Madam Lan gasped in horror, her normally calm demeanor shattered by the sight.

Wei Wuxian's body was sent flying, crashing into the nearest tree with a sickening thud. The bark splintered upon impact, and he crumpled to the ground in a heap. His once vibrant robes were now smeared with dirt and blood, as a fresh wave of crimson spilled from his lips.

Time seemed to freeze.

Wen Zhuliu, his attacker, stood rooted to the spot. His eyes widened in disbelief. He hadn't expected this. The infamous Core-Melting Hand had struck only hollow emptiness.

"Of course Wen Zhuliu would be shocked. He doesn't have his core anymore," Lan Xichen whispered under his breath.

Beside him, Song Lan scowled, his eyes narrowing into slits as they bored into Wen Zhuliu. "I'd forgotten he was Wen Chao's loyal dog," he muttered bitterly, disgust evident in his tone.

Wei Wuxian staggered to his feet, still swaying from the impact of Wen Zhuliu's blow. Before he could fully steady himself—

A sharp, metallic sound cut through the air. The cold steel of a sword pierced through his back, its tip emerging from his chest.

For a moment, the world stood still.

“No!” Cangse Sanren’s scream shattered the silence as she watched her son’s body buckle under the blow. The sight of blood staining his robes—the life slowly draining from his already weary form—was too much to bear.

Wei Changze was unable to fully grasp the brutality of the scene before him. The violence unfolding was overwhelming, triggering painful memories of his son's earlier sufferings and amplifying the anguish coursing through him. What shook him even more was the cruel timing of Wen Chao’s appearance. That this despicable man would arrive immediately after the operation, felt like a bitter twist of fate.

Wei Wuxian collapsed to the ground, his body crumpling lifelessly, like a puppet with its strings severed. Behind him, Wen Chao’s smirking face appeared, twisted with triumph as he arrogantly withdrew the blade, letting it drip with Wei Wuxian’s blood.

“Wei Wuxian!” Jiang Cheng’s voice boomed across the room.

“Senior Wei!" the junior disciples cried out, their eyes wide with shock, hands flying to their mouths as they recoiled in horror at the sight before them.

“That wretched dog!” Jingyi burst out, his voice laced with fury.

Lan Qiren did not even reprimand him for the outburst.

“How dare he?!” Zizhen demanded, his voice trembling as his eyes welled with tears of frustration.

Sizhui was rendered speechless. He could only focus on the sight of his Xian-gege’s still body, blood pooling beneath him.

The other cultivators stood frozen, their faces a mixture of shock and disbelief. Jiang Fengmian's normally stoic expression cracked as he processed the sight before him.

Nie Mingjue's face twisted into a snarl, his hand reflexively moving to his saber, the urge to take action barely restrained. He had expected many things in battle, but seeing Wei Wuxian cut down like this, in such a cowardly, underhanded manner, filled him with fury. "Wen Chao... you disgrace your clan with such vile tactics," he spat under his breath.

Lan Xichen's usually steady composure wavered, and his gaze shifted to his brother, Lan Wangji, whose expression had darkened with something far more than anger. He was already angry earlier, but this scene in particular intensified it to such a degree that Lan Xichen now found himself genuinely concerned.

Even those who had long harbored disdain for Wei Wuxian were now beginning to feel a reluctant sense of concern for him, a realization they wished to deny but could no longer ignore. The Yiling Laozu was invincible in battle. However, having witnessed the events from the beginning to this very moment, they were beginning to understand Wei Wuxian's hatred for Wen Chao and the desperation that had driven him to use demonic cultivation.

Inwardly, they wished for nothing more than for Wei Wuxian to end Wen Chao's life here and now. Yet, in his current weakened state, even lifting a sword seemed an insurmountable task.

"Wei Wuxian will kill Wen Chao," one female cultivator stated with conviction.

"Yes," her companion agreed. "I've heard about what happened in the past. I just hope I can witness him deliver the most brutal justice possible."

Wen Zhuliu, having stepped back beside Wen Chao, stood in grim silence. His face, though impassive, flickered with a faint unease. He had followed orders—done what needed to be done—but even he hadn't expected Wei Wuxian to fall so easily. Something didn't sit right.

Wen Chao, on the other hand, basked in Wei Wuxian's vulnerable state. He lips formed a smug grin, reveling in his moment of victory. "What, are you down on your knees already?" he sneered, his voice thick with arrogance. "Pathetic."

"You vile bastard," Cangse Sanren retorted, her voice charged with indignation. "I curse you —may your name be damned for all eternity for inflicting such pain upon my son!"

The other cultivators exchanged glances, their expressions darkening in response to Wen Chao's taunt.

"If he were still alive," Nie Huaisang murmured softly, his voice barely audible but laced with a dangerous edge, "I would have skinned him alive."

Several heads turned toward him, eyes widening in disbelief. Even Nie Mingjue felt a flicker of shock ripple through him. Yet, deep down, it wasn't entirely surprising. His brother had always hidden a sharpness beneath the layers of harmless demeanor and with his intricate webs of manipulation. It would be no great surprise if Nie Huaisang's words were not just an idle remark but a glimpse into his calculating mind.

As Wei Wuxian struggled to rise from the ground, a violent cough forced a river of blood to surge from his lips, staining the ground beneath him. The taste of iron filled his mouth, and his vision swam, blurred by exhaustion and injury. Before he could steady himself, another brutal kick sent him sprawling back to the dirt, a sickening thud accompanying his collapse.

Wen Chao loomed over him, his expression twisted in delight. "What's wrong? Fight back!" he mocked, his voice rising in a vicious sneer. "Weren't you supposed to be good? I heard legends about the great Wei Wuxian—yet look at you now, groveling like a dog at my feet."

"You ambushed him!" Jin Ling shouted, his tone raw and trembling with rage. "You coward! How dare you attack him like this—like a snake, striking from the shadows!"

“Ridicule him only when you surpass him,” Jin Zixuan hissed, his eyes narrowing into a sharp glare as they locked onto Wen Chao.

Mianmian, her face flushed with fury, spatm “You’ll never be half the man Wei Wuxian is. No matter how many cheap tricks you use, no matter how many lies you tell, Wei Wuxian will always be better than you. And deep down, you know it. That's why you fear him.”

“You brat!” Wen Chao sneered, voice rising as he continued his relentless mockery. “Didn’t you jump around quite a bit back in the Xuanwu of Slaughter’s cave? And now you're finished with just a single strike? Go on, keep jumping! Show me how arrogant you are!”

Jiang Wanyin’s hands clenched into fists so tightly his knuckles turned white, veins bulging with barely restrained fury. His jaw was set, teeth grinding as his heart burned with helpless rage at the sight of his brother crumpled on the ground. If only he could charge forward and strike Wen Chao down—but he can’t. His nails dug into his palms as the venom of the insult seeped into his mind, tainting his thoughts with revenge.

Lan Qiren, who had initially maintained a stoic silence, finally broke, his tone filled with icy disdain, “Mocking a man already brought low, incapable of facing him with honor on equal ground? Such is the way of your sect.”

Beside him, Qingheng-jun and Lan Xichen both inclined their heads in agreement.

“If Senior Wei were at his full strength, he’d surpass your arrogance with ease,” Jingyi retorted, his voice laced with disgust. “You’d be the one bowing your head in shame for daring to provoke him.”

Meanwhile, Yu Ziyuan's presence had been quietly simmering beneath the surface, but now her eyes gleamed with a cold, lethal fury. She knew she had no right to feel anger on Wei Wuxian’s behalf, not after everything she had done to him. Yet, despite her own transgressions, Wei Wuxian remained a member of the Jiang Clan—a fact she could not deny, no matter how prideful she was. Though she would never admit it aloud, even to herself, Wei Wuxian had been one of the Jiang Clan’s finest disciples.

Her piercing gaze locked onto Wen Chao, her thoughts cold and calculated. ‘*You think yourself victorious because Wei Wuxian has fallen?’* she mused darkly. *‘Fool. Once you’ve burned out the last of your pitiful power, you’ll be the one on your knees.’*

“Where is Jiang Cheng?” Wen Chao inquired, his tone dripping with malice.

Wei Wuxian remained silent, offering only the sound of his heavy, labored breaths in response.

“What? Is silence all you can muster?” Wen Chao laughed mockingly. “You cannot save him by refusing to speak. As it stands, Jiang Cheng is nothing but a burden—a mere animal.”

Yu Ziyuan’s protective instincts flared as she growled defensively at Wen Chao's words. Even Jiang Fengmian and Jiang Yanli had their brows furrowed, frustrated at the scene before them.

“How dare you! You ambushed him!” Jin Ling and Jingyi exclaimed at the same time.

“The Yunmeng Jiang Clan is finished,” Wen Chao declared with a contemptuous grin.

Finally, Wei Wuxian lifted his gaze, glaring fiercely at the assembled Wens, a flash of determination igniting in his eyes.

“Your downfall will come long before ours,” Jiang Fengmian muttered lowly. His words, though quiet, carried an unexpected weight that silenced the air around him.

Lan Qiren, standing nearby, registered Jiang Fengmian's uncharacteristic outburst with quiet surprise. It was a tone of icy fury, one he'd never before heard from the usually composed clan leader. But then, considering the gravity of the memories they were now witnessing, such a reaction was more than warranted.

“Yes,” Qingheng-jun remarked in response, his voice carrying a calm yet cutting edge. “Such bold words for a man whose clan teeters on the brink of ruin.”

Wen Chao’s lip curled in contempt, and he taunted further, “What’s wrong? Your old masters are gone. You should learn your place, wag your tail, and kneel before your new ones.”

A high-pitched voice, filled with malicious delight, chimed in, “Wen-gongzi~!” Wang Lingjiao crooned with a sickening sweetness, batting her lashes at Wen Chao. “Quick! Chop off his hand, will you? He still owes me one!”

Cangse Sanren, whose temper had been simmering under control, could hold back no longer, “You shameless, conniving wretch!” she spat, her voice resonating with raw disgust. “A harlot with no honor to speak of, yet you dare demand such cruelty with that disgusting smile on your face?! How dare you stand there like some pampered pet, feeding off others’ misery while you contribute nothing but venom and deceit? You little shit, I will curse you for targeting my son like this.”

Her words sent a sudden chill through the room, for everyone present understood all too well —when it came to matters concerning her son, she would act without hesitation, whether the issue was grave or insignificant.

Even Wei Changze and Lan Wangji bore expressions of quiet fury. It was as if they were poised on the edge, silently daring Wen Chao to act on Wang Lingjiao’s vile command. The moment he did, they would strike without hesitation.

“No, no, no, let’s not hurry,” Wen Chao decided.

Meanwhile, Wen Zhuliu stood on the side, staring down at his hand in confusion.

Unaware of the storm brewing within his bodyguard’s mind, Wen Chao merely hummed, his tone almost jovial as he mused aloud, “Yes, precisely. It took us such an

inordinate amount of time to locate that brat; we must savor this. Lopping off his hand all at once would cause excessive bleeding. Should he perish prematurely, where's the fun in that?"

The scene was suffused with barely contained fury, even from the likes of Lan Qiren and Qingheng-jun, men known for their composure. Their anger was palpable, simmering beneath the surface as they witnessed the injustice unfolding before them. Wei Wuxian had only just descended from the mountain after enduring a harrowing surgery, yet here he was, subjected to the demeaning cruelty of a mere Wen heir.

Wei Wuxian was the embodiment of heroism and selflessness. Clever and courageous, his actions always spoke of a man willing to sacrifice everything for the greater good. In many ways, he was more than what the world deserved from this otherwise grim reality. It was little wonder that this had ignited such rage among those who cared for him.

Wen Chao, by contrast, was the antithesis of Wei Wuxian. He was petty and ignoble, devoid of the strength of character or moral compass that defined his counterpart. He was a man whose worth was measured not by his virtues but by the shadow cast by his family's influence—a man who could only diminish others because he himself could never measure up.

"Very well! Begin by melting his core," Wen Chao commanded, his voice dripping with malice as he crouched down, seizing Wei Wuxian by the hair. With an aggressive yank, he forced the boy to meet his eyes, a cruel grin stretching across his face. "I want to hear him scream the way that pathetic Jiang Cheng did!"

From behind the screen, Yu Ziyuan and Cangse Sanren reacted in unison, their fury erupting like a storm. Both women took decisive steps forward, their intent clear—to storm through the screen and deliver righteous vengeance upon Wen Chao. However, their husbands, Jiang Fengmian and Wei Changze, restrained them, their grips firm but their own wrath no less contained.

"Do you think you'll escape the same fate as my son?" Cangse Sanren spat, her voice a venomous hiss.

“You’ll be the one begging for mercy, screaming until your throat is raw, when my son comes for you, you filthy Wendog!” Yu Ziyuan exclaimed, her tone fierce, her eyes blazing with maternal rage.

Wang Lingjiao’s laughter rang out like the sharp chime of malice, “An excellent suggestion, Wen-er-gongzi! Start by melting his core—strip him of his cultivation—and then sever his hand for good measure.”

Her tone was dripping with cruelty, yet Wei Wuxian’s response was far from one of despair or anger. Instead, he spat a mouthful of blood onto Wen Chao's face, the crimson staining his cheek like a mocking mark of defiance.

Nie Mingjue allowed his lips to twitch upward in faint amusement, his sharp eyes taking in the scene with a mixture of disbelief and reluctant admiration.

To everyone’s surprise, Wei Wuxian began to laugh, the sound startlingly genuine despite the severity of his situation.

Confusion rippled through the room. How could anyone find humor in such dire circumstances? What could possibly amuse him at this moment?

“He *‘would’* laugh in a situation like this,” Jingyi muttered under his breath, rolling his eyes. “Leave it to Wei Wuxian to be the one person who doesn’t take his own struggle seriously.”

“A-Xian, please, just run!” Jiang Yanli pleaded, her voice trembling with a combination of fear, desperation, and anger. “Find a way to escape!”

But the reality of the situation was inescapable. The Wens had surrounded him completely, cutting off every possible escape.

“Run?” Wei Wuxian echoed mockingly, his grin widening. “Why not? Seems like an excellent plan!” His laughter bubbled forth again, this time louder, sharper, as though

mocking not only his captors but fate itself. “Come now, show me the best torture techniques you’ve got. I’d hate to die without knowing the full extent of your cruelty!”

“Wei-ying!” Cangse Sanren’s voice cracked as she called out, torn between fury and agony. She couldn’t decide if she should scold him for his recklessness or mourn him prematurely for the inevitable.

Wei Changze have found this scene hauntingly familiar. His wife’s fiery personality, her talent for provoking those she loathed, had clearly been inherited by their son. Watching Wei Wuxian toy with his enemies in this moment, even at the brink of death, would have been like seeing a ghost of his wife’s defiance—one he might have admired in another context but now wished Wei Wuxian had not so thoroughly embraced.

‘Wei Ying, stop this and escape!’ he screamed in his mind.

“How long do you think you can keep up this charade?” Wang Lingjiao sneered, her eyes gleaming with sadistic delight.

“Close to death, and yet still you posture as a hero,” Wen Chao added with a derisive snort. “What arrogance.”

Jin Ling, watching from the sidelines, could no longer hold back his frustration. “What *is wrong* with him?!” he exclaimed, his voice a mix of bewilderment and disbelief. “He’s practically *begging* for death!”

“It is precisely because death is near that I am elated!” Wei Wuxian declared, and a wild grin spread across his bloodied face, his teeth gleaming against the smears of crimson. “Come then! Torture me if you dare—the crueler, the better!”

The gleam in his eyes was manic, unyielding, and suffused with a madness so intense that even the most hardened of Wen cultivators involuntarily took a step back.

“And when I die,” Wei Wuxian continued, his voice dipping into an ominous cadence, “I will return as a fierce ghost! I’ll haunt you until the darkness consumes you all. I’ll drag you into the abyss with me!”

Wen Chao faltered. For a fleeting moment, his face betrayed a flicker of unease as he instinctively flinched back.

The cultivators stood stunned, and an oppressive silence enveloped the room.

“A fierce ghost, you say?” Wen Chao finally managed, his voice wavering before he forced himself to laugh. Steeling his nerves, he took a deliberate step forward, his lips curling into a sneer. “What nonsense! Do you think you can frighten me with idle threats?”

He raised a hand and struck Wei Wuxian, the force of the blow slamming his head into the ground.

“Wei Ying!” Lan Wangji exclaimed, his usual stoicism was replaced with an unmistakable fury that burned in his eyes and clenched his jaw. The sight of his husband, bloodied yet unbowed, only deepened Lan Wangji’s inner turmoil. Every instinct within him screamed for action—to end this madness before it could consume the man he could not bear to lose.

But Wen Chao, eager to reestablish his dominance, ignored her. “The Young Masters of the great sects,” he began mockingly, “have all undergone soul-calming ceremonies since they were young. Do you think your ghostly threats mean anything to me?”

Unbeknownst to him, Wen Chao was echoing the very words Wei Wuxian had teasingly told Jiang Cheng only days prior.

And yet, despite the blood staining his face and the cruel strike that had sent him sprawling, Wei Wuxian continued to laugh. It was the laugh of someone who had already accepted death—and in doing so, had become something far more terrifying than a mere mortal.

Some of the cultivators had the slightest idea on why he's not afraid of death. It wasn't because he was someone who was heroic, but he was someone who had nothing to lose now, and that's even more terrifying.

"Oh, young master, you couldn't be more wrong," he snickered, his tone turning patronizing. "I haven't been raised in the Jiang Clan since birth. I'm the son of rogue cultivators. I haven't gone through the ceremony."

If that was the case….

"He could return as a fierce ghost," Madam Jin whispered.

"No!" Jiang Yanli exclaimed, horrified by the prospect of her brother turning into a fierce ghost.

But he did turn into someone fierce. If Wen Chao killed him, Wei Wuxian would hunt him down and repay the favor.

"If I die full of resentment, I'll pay you back a hundredfold after my death!"

Wen Chao paled.

And everyone else paled visibly, their expressions betraying the weight of Wei Wuxian's words. Everyone understood the gravity of his threats—he had never been one for idle boasts. His return to the cultivation world after a brief disappearance, the once-dominant Wen Clan had suffered devastating losses.

For the disciples, the situation teetered on the edge of morbid fascination. They were so close to witnessing firsthand how their revered Senior Wei had come to be branded the villain of the cultivation world. Though the transformation was shrouded in infamy, their curiosity

outweighed their fear. They wanted to understand the path that had led him to such a fate, even if it meant confronting the worst parts of him.

“Young Master Wen, don’t listen to this nonsense,” Wang Lingjiao suggested. “Not everyone becomes a ferocious ghost after they die—the time, place, and situation all need to be right. Besides, even if he did become one, the Qishan Wen Sect can handle a single ghost.”

And yet Wen Chao still hesitated.

“He wasn’t even a fierce ghost, yet he’s capable of wiping out an entire clan on his own,” Jin Ling muttered. “How much more devastating would he be if he actually became one?”

Jingyi nodded solemnly, adding, “The cultivation world would’ve been plunged into chaos No sect, no alliance, would have been able to stand against such unrelenting fury.”

“I think that’s a bit of an exaggeration,” a Nie Sect disciple interjected, his tone skeptical. “After all, they managed to capture Wen Ning in the past, didn’t they?”

Lan Jingyi let out an exasperated groan, his frustration evident. “You just don’t get it, do you?” he retorted. “I’m not talking about capturing him. I’m talking about the intensity of his resentment. Even if someone were to succeed in restraining him, do you honestly think the cultivation world could endure the force of that resentment? Handling Chifeng-jun and Wen Ning was already a challenge, and their grievances pale in comparison to what he could unleash.”

“Moreover,” Jin Ling interjected, “Wei Wuxian is incredibly smart. Who can predict the extent of what he might achieve should he become a fierce ghost?”

“Can you two stop talking about him becoming a fierce ghost?” Lan Sizhui interjected, his tone laced with mild frustration as he pinched the bridge of his nose. The mere thought of his Xian-gege transforming into such a malevolent entity unsettled him deeply. Adding to his unease was the expression on his uncle’s discomforted face as he listened to the ongoing discussion.

The Nie disciple, Jin Ling, and Jingyi shut their mouths after that.

Annoyed, Wang Lingjiao continued, "Don't tell me that you'll let him go just because he threatened you?"

"O-of course not!"

Cangse Sanren cursed, "I'll skin her alive."

Knowing that he'd definitely die, Wei Wuxian grew calm. The bone-deep hatred within him settled into iron-hard determination.

"Why are just accepting this, A-xian?!" Wei Changze protested. Yes, it was true that none of them could see a way out of this, but Wei Wuxian could do anything. And yet, it seemed like he wasn't planning on fighting back at all.

'Is he really not going to fight at all?' Wei Changze thought as he clenched his jaw and fist in frustration. Even if his son lost his core, and on top of that he's on the verge of recovering after that surgery, he should still think about how to escape and go to Jiang Wanyin! He just can't surrender like this!

Not like this!

Finally, Wen Chao could no longer endure the cold indifference etched into Wei Wuxian's expression. The defiance, unspoken yet palpable, stoked his irritation to dangerous levels. His threats had fallen flat, and he knew it—but there was something far more unsettling eating away at him.

Fear.

It crept into his chest, cold and insidious, as though Wei Wuxian's composed demeanor was a mirror reflecting his own inadequacy. His frustration boiled over, and with a snarl, he lashed out, kicking Wei Wuxian sharply in the stomach. The sound of impact was followed swiftly by the flurry of movement as other Wen disciples moved to mimic his actions, their cowardice masked by their leader's aggression.

The atmosphere in the room grew heavy with evident hostility as all eyes turned toward Wen Chao, their glares sharp and unforgiving. The Wei family, along with Lan Wangji, simmered with barely contained fury.

But in the midst of this, a voice cut through, low and disdainful. "You see his indifference, and now you're trembling?" Nie Mingjue's tone was biting, each word dripping with scorn as he took in Wen Chao's growing panic. His sharp eyes caught the subtle quiver in the man's posture, the cracks forming in his once-overbearing façade. "Where is your arrogance now, Wen Chao?"

"Is this the strength of Qishan Wen's supposed heir? Reduced to quaking at the mere sight of someone who won't bow to your pitiful bluster?" Qingheng-jun said, his words laced with disdain.

Lan Qiren scoffed and remarked, "Truly humiliating."

As the vicious blows rained down upon Wei Wuxian, his body became a canvas of bruises. His face, chest, and limbs were streaked with swelling, darkening the once-pristine skin beneath. A well-aimed kick landed squarely on his back, causing him to gasp as the air was knocked from his lungs. Yet, despite the overwhelming pain, he remained eerily composed, a stillness in his eyes that betrayed no trace of fear or desperation.

Time seemed to stretch on interminably, until Wen Chao finally, almost begrudgingly, issued the command, "Enough!"

Wei Wuxian, blood trickling from his lips, glanced over his shoulder with an unsettling calm.

The indifference in his gaze sent a shiver through the crowd, a stark contrast to the torture he had just endured.

"Just why is he so calm about this?!" Mianmian exclaimed, unable to hold back any longer. Her gaze darted from Wei Wuxian, still eerily composed despite the abuse, to the others around her, hoping for an explanation that made sense.

His thoughts were far from the present agony.

'Is it time to kill me?'* he wondered. *'It won't be all that different even if I die. Can't be worse than living! And there's a one in three chance I'll become a fierce ghost and seek revenge.'

"Wait… what?"

"He's really just accepting this?"

"Not fighting back-"

"A-xian, no!"

As more outraged shouts passed through the watchers. It was undeniable that the Wei Wuxian before them was trying to die, and the obvious answer was *'to conceal the truth that he has already lost his golden core.'*

"He's not just ignoring the pain. He's embracing it, like he wants them to break him—like he's daring them to try," Zizhen chimed in, shaking their head in disbelief.

"Why is he like this?!" Jin Zixuan said, feeling frustrated as well.

As audacious as ever, Wei Wuxian maintained a defiant gaze directed at Wen Chao, a sly smirk playing on his lips. Wen Chao had envisioned breaking Wei Wuxian's spirit, forcing him to kneel and beg for mercy, yet the more time passed, the less likely that outcome seemed.

A dark thought crossed Wen Chao's mind, and with a sudden, knowing smile, he made a decision.

"Wei Ying," he sneered, his tone dripping with contempt. "You think you're invincible, don't you? That you're some paragon of courage and strength?"

Cangse Sanren clenched his teeth in frustration, thinking, '*Fuck this kid. I don't care if he's Wen Ruohan's heir—if there's another world where I'm still alive, I'm killing him on sight'*

"Oh, look at that. A Wen-dog who can speak like a human."

Wen Chao slammed his fist down.

"Laughing in the face of danger," Jiang Fengmian muttered under his breath. While he was well aware of Wei Wuxian's tendency to provoke others—often in a playful manner—he couldn't help but feel a rising irritation at his behavior in such a dire situation. *'A-Xian, are you even aware of the situation you're in right now? How can you still muster the strength to provoke him like this?'*

Wen Chao, his expression twisting into a cruel smirk, stepped forward, taunting, "Fine, continue flaunting your sharp tongue. Let's see how long you can maintain this farce of heroism."

With a dismissive gesture, Wen Chao signaled to Wei Wuxian, and Wen Zhuliu obediently moved to lift him.

The order was as casual as it was merciless. "Take him."

“Wait, where are you taking him?!” Cangse Sanren’s voice rang out, taut with urgency. She stepped forward, her expression a tempest of fury and anxiety. “Where are you taking him? What do you plan to do?!”

Mianmian also felt Cangse Sanren’s sentiment, exclaiming, “He’s innocent. Whatever grievance you hold, he has no part in it. If you have any sense of justice—”

“Justice and Wen Chao don’t belong in the same sentence,” Madam Jin retorted sharply. “If he possessed even a shred of justice, he would have spared countless lives instead of reveling in their suffering.”

As Wei Wuxian hung limply in Wen Zhuliu’s arms, his battered body swayed with the motion of their ascent. He had no strength left to resist, his injuries rendering him defenseless. The clarity bell, a tool meant to guard against hallucinations and dark spells, broke loose from his robes and fell to the ground with a faint chime.

After being silent for a while and forcing herself to remain indifferent, Yu Ziyuan finally reacted, her nails dug into her palms as she clenched her fists, the sharp sting of pain grounding her in the moment. Yes, the bell was a tool of protection, but it was more than that —it was a symbol of a cultivator’s identity.

The sight of the bell brought back the sting of her clan’s downfall, an ache she tried so hard to bury under layers of detachment. But in this moment, her composure crumbled. She could no longer ignore the harsh reality that the once-proud Jiang Clan had fallen, their honor tarnished, their strength scattered to the winds. The faint chime of the bell might as well have been the toll of a funeral knell, a sound that reverberated deep in her soul.

Hell, for all her strength and reputation, she had been unable to protect what mattered most.

While Yu Ziyuan wrestled with her inner turmoil, Madam Jin observed her carefully, her sharp gaze cutting through the tension in the room. Inwardly, she mused, ‘*Regardless of whether this is about Wei Wuxian or your own regrets over what you’ve lost, it changes nothing.’*

Then, the scene changed. The Wens soared into the sky, their flight leaving the mountains behind. The towering peaks gradually faded into the distance, a mere blur beneath them, as the world below shrank away, leaving behind the recovering Jiang Wanyin.

Wei Wuxian, barely clinging to consciousness through the searing pain of his injuries, struggled to make sense of the situation. '*Why are they taking me so high into the air?'* he wondered. *'Are they going to drop me from somewhere and let me fall to my death?'*

'Burial Mounds,' Lan Wangji, pale with horror, spoke almost inaudibly. His voice trembled slightly, betraying the dread that coiled in his chest. Of course the Wens would choose this cursed place. The place where resentful energy runs rampant, where every shadow feels tainted by the lingering deaths of those who came before.

And Lan Wangji wasn't alone in his horror.

Jiang Wanyin's face had gone ashen, his gaze fixed on the sky with wide eyes.

It was then that Wei Changze, whose ears were sharper than most, caught the whisper of the words Lan Wangji had uttered. His breath caught in his throat, and a cold rush of panic surged through him. "Did you just say *Burial Mounds?"* he demanded, his voice trembling with urgency.

"What?!" Cangse Sanren snapped, her voice sharp with disbelief and horror.

Wei Changze and Cangse Sanren's sudden panic was mirrored by the others in the room.

Jiang Yanli, still paralyzed with fear, managed to speak, her voice low and shaken. "The Burial Mounds... but that place—it's hell on earth. No one survives that..."

Lan Qiren, who had remained silent until now, narrowed his eyes, his lips tightening into a thin line. “The Wens have gone too far,” he muttered under her breath.

“H-How much…” Cangse Sanren’s voice wavered, barely above a whisper, but the anguish in it was unmistakable. Her breath hitched in her chest as her hand trembled at her side, her grief threatening to tear her apart. “Just how much is my son going to suffer like this?” Her voice cracked, and for a brief moment, it was as though the ground beneath her had given way. “What has he done to deserve such a cruel, brutal fate? How much longer…?”

For a while she watched her son fight, struggle, and push through so much, only for him to be cast aside so mercilessly by those he had once called allies. This—this was not the life she had hoped for for her son, All of this were pure cruelty! If Lan Wangji was true to his words, the thought of her son being dragged to that hellish place—where the lingering spirits of the dead devoured one’s very soul—crushed her.

No one in the room could speak because they all knew—none of them were innocent. Most of the cultivators here had, in some way, contributed to Wei Wuxian’s downfall. Some had trampled on his honor, turned away from the light of his true nature, and now they were forced to watch as the consequences of their actions played out in the cruelest of ways. The bitterness of it all left a sour taste in their mouths—no one was blameless, and no one could deny the role they had played in shaping Wei Wuxian’s tragic fate.

The scene abruptly shifted.

Now, they stood at the edge of a cliff, the sharp wind biting at their skin as they gazed out over the desolate landscape. All around them, jagged mountains pierced the heavens like the spines of some ancient, slumbering beast. Their dark, foreboding forms blended seamlessly into the suffocating blackness of the clouds that loomed overhead.

Beneath them, the valley stretched deep and endless, a yawning abyss that seemed to swallow any trace of light. The only hint of life was a faint, unsettling red glow, pulsing softly in the depths of the valley, as though the very earth below had been tainted by the vengeful spirits that roamed it.

An ocean of pressure surged through them, relentless and heavy. Their knees buckled, unable to withstand the oppressive force, and they collapsed onto the ground, struggling to remain

conscious. The energy was so strong, and no one in the group could ignore its all-consuming presence.

They're here—the Burial Mounds.

'Is this what you felt, Wei Ying?' he thought, his gaze lingering on the valley. '*Is this the suffocating darkness you absorbed when you began to delve into resentful energy?'* The realization was chilling. To be here, to feel the press of this energy—it was no wonder that Wei Wuxian had been consumed by it.

Above them, the cawing of crows echoed through the air, their dark forms circling lazily above the cliff, indifferent to the chaos below.

Wen Chao stood arrogantly, his posture haughty and unmoved by the looming presence of the Burial Mounds. Wen Zhuliu, ever the stoic servant, remained utterly unfazed, his calm demeanor unshaken by the overwhelming energy.

But it was the sight of Wei Wuxian—thrown to the ground, lying at Wen Chao's feet—that struck a cold, harsh chord in the air.

And for those watching, the horrific truth was undeniable—this was the place where Wei Wuxian had been forged in darkness.

"Wei Ying," Wen Chao called out. "Do you have any idea where we are?"

Wei Wuxian forced himself to look up, then flinched.

"That's right," Wen Chao grinned. "The Burial Mounds."

A loud crack resounded throughout the room. All eyes turned, startled by the sudden noise, their gazes snapping toward the source. Debris crumbled to the floor as the once-sturdy pillar

beside Wei Changze splintered down the middle, its fractured halves threatening to collapse entirely.

Wei Changze stood rigid. The confirmation made his heart drop. His knuckles were bloodied, skin torn from the force of the blow. Even as resentful energy coursed through the room, weighing down on everyone, his fury burned hotter.

And yet, for all his strength, for all his pain, he was powerless.

He gazed at his sleeping son, longing gripping his chest—a desire to shield him from the world's relentless cruelty, to protect him against every harm that lay in wait. Yet, despite his wish to protect his son, the scars of the past—the pain he had endured—could never be erased that easily.

Completely unhindered, the simulated Wen Chao continued, "It's right in Yiling. I'm sure even you Yunmeng people have heard about it. It's a mountain of corpses—an ancient battleground. You'll be able to dig up a corpse anywhere on this mountain."

Besides being a battle ground for wars, the area had long been a dumping ground for unwanted corpses.

The resentful energy here was higher than anywhere else in the world.

"Look at the darkness in the air," Wen Chao taunted, his smirk widening as he gestured toward the malevolent energy swirling around them. "Can you smell that resentment? Many people of all ages have tried to remove it. None of them has ever succeeded. Even the mighty Wen Sect couldn't conquer it. All we could do was block it off, keep it at bay."

His words dripped with mockery as he slammed his foot down on Wei Wuxian's already battered form, forcing him against the cold, unyielding ground. Wei Wuxian coughed weakly.

“How dare you?!” Cangse Sanren’s voice rang out, reaching out to grab Wen Chao. But it was pointless. Her outstretched hand met nothing but air, stopped by the reality that this was nothing more than her son’s memory. She couldn’t touch Wen Chao, couldn’t stop him, couldn’t take her son’s place and bear the suffering herself. All she could do was watch.

“I swear to god if I see that ugly face in my dreams I’m burning him alive,” Jin Ling whispered, earning a soft scold from Yanli, and a bit of approving nod from his father, Jin Zixuan.

Wen Chao grabbed Wei Wuxian’s hair to pull him up, a grotesque grin on his face.

He pushed Wei Wuxian to the edge of the cliff.

“No,” Jiang Yanli whispered, forcing herself up on trembling arms. “Stop! This-”

“This isn’t right!” Jingyi and Zizhen gasped out, barely conscious under the pressure.

“Let him go!” Sizhui shouted angrily.

Even Lan Qiren couldn’t scold him when he felt the same sentiment as him.

“So you…” Wen Chao trailed off, his smirk widening with glee. “will never escape!”

In slow motion, Wen Chao pushed Wei Wuxian off the cliff, his hand holding out as if wanting to grasp onto something.

“Wei Ying!” Cangse Sanren and Wei Changze shouted, instantly sinking onto their knees to catch their son, but slamming against the floor instead.

Wei Wuxian fell down….

Down….

Until his silhouette was gone…

"No," Cangse Sanren whispered in anguish, tears falling down her cheeks as Wei Changze embraced her tightly.

"A-Xian!" Jiang Yanli called out brokenly, tears also falling down her cheeks as she stood up to walk towards the screen as if to help her younger brother out, but Jin Zixuan and Jin Ling held her wrist tightly. Jin Ling had her eyes closed, unable to bear the scene, and Jin Zixuan chanted prayers, wishing for anyone to help him.

Jiang Wanyin also sank onto his knees, his frame trembling as his face morphed into a thousand emotions at once. *'No,'* he thought, barely registering that he witnessed his brother fall into the burial mounds. With trembling hands, he covered his face. He wanted to vomit, to release his emotions, but he doesn't even know what to do now. Even if he had his brother's core in the past, he wouldn't be able to save him at that moment. Look at how he's affected—everyone's affected with the resentful energy—despite it being in his brother's memory only.

Fuck, despite being this strong, despite being a formidable leader now, is he still this weak?

Beside Jiang Wanyin, Lan Wangji's composed facade shattered, silent tears streaming down his face as he cradled Wei Wuxian's limp form. His hold was desperate, bordering on unrelenting, as though by sheer will he could anchor his husband to the mortal plane. His chest tightened with pain, every beat of his heart was a silent cry of despair.

The pain was unlike anything he had ever felt. He did not weep when his father refused his presence, nor shed a tear at his mother's farewell, but he cried for Wei Ying, for his unyielding kindness, his endless suffering, his bravery.

Lan Qiren and Lan Xichen watched him, their hearts heavy and torn at the sight of his silent tears. It was not the first time they had witnessed him cry, yet this was something else entirely —a soundless grief louder than any sob could have been.

The suffocating weight that had settled over them lifted in an instant as the memory shifted back to the forest where Wei Wuxian had last been seen.

In the heart of the clearing, Wei Wuxian's clarity bell lay discarded on the grass. Beside it, a dark stain of blood marred the grass. The silence was heavy, broken only by the faint rustling of leaves as someone moved through the forest's grounds.

Everyone present tensed, their breaths hitching as hope flickered alive in their hearts. Could it be help? Or perhaps Jiang Wanyin had finally descended the mountain to aid in the search.

"Please, let it be A-Cheng," Jiang Yanli whispered fervently, her hands clasped together in a desperate prayer.

Pure white robes emerged from the shadows.

"Wangji?" Lan Qiren's usually composed demeanor faltered, his eyes widening in surprise. Though he knew Lan Wangji had been searching for Wei Wuxian, he hadn't anticipated him investigating this specific area. A pang of regret crossed Lan Qiren's mind—if Lan Wangji had arrived sooner, perhaps he might have intervened, might have prevented the horrors that had unfolded here.

Yet, Lan Qiren's thoughts darkened further. Even someone as skilled and disciplined as Lan Wangji would have been powerless against the likes of Wen Zhuliu. Perhaps it was a cruel mercy that Wangji had not been present, spared from an inevitable defeat.

Lan Wangji stepped into the clearing, his gaze falling upon the clarity bell that lay so innocently amidst the devastation. His usually impassive expression shattered, despair etched plainly across his features.

Lan Wangji vividly recalled that day, the creeping dread that had begun to convince him of the unthinkable—that Wei Wuxian might have truly died.

Now, seeing these haunting remnants of that memory, the weight of it all crashed over him, and despair consumed his heart anew.

Lan Wangji extended a trembling hand toward the bell and drawing it close to his chest.

“Lan-er-gongzi,” a voice called softly from behind, breaking the stillness. “According to the villagers, Wei-gongzi and Jiang-gongzi were seen passing through this area a few days ago. Our search has been exhaustive, but so far, we’ve found no trace of them.”

Lan Wangji’s fingers tightened around the clarity bell, his knuckles paling with the force of his grip. After a moment, he carefully tucked it inside his robes.

The subtle tremor in Lan Wangji’s movements did not escape Lan Xichen’s notice. His heart clenched at the sight of his younger brother, a boy of only seventeen, burdened with the weight of responsibility far beyond his years. His brother should not have to bear such a burden while grappling with the possibility of losing someone so dear to him.

Wei Wuxian was seventeen too, Lan Xichen realized with a pang of sorrow—just a boy swept up in a torrent of violence and tragedy. The thought was almost unbearable.

Lan Xichen forced himself to steady his breathing, to suppress the ache that threatened to consume him. These children had endured hardships he could scarcely fathom. It was a humbling realization, one that left him feeling small and ashamed for ever comparing his own struggles to theirs.

To Wei Wuxian’s, especially.

The Lan disciple who had spoken earlier hesitated, his brows furrowing as silence stretched thin between them. “Are they…?” he ventured cautiously, the unspoken

question hanging in the air.

Lan Wangji offered no reply. His gaze shifted upward, fixing on the expanse of sky above.

“Wei Ying,” his lips moved in a barely audible whisper, carrying a name like a prayer.

Wei Changze stepped forward, his face etched with a weary gratitude. He inclined his head toward Lan Wangji. “Thank you,” he said quietly, “for searching for them, for A-Ying.”

Lan Wangji met his gaze, nodding in acknowledgment, though inwardly, he dismissed the need for such gratitude. How could Wei Changze thank him for doing something that felt as essential as breathing? Searching for Wei Wuxian was not an obligation but an instinct, a truth etched into his very soul—he could not do otherwise.

Behind them, Yu Ziyuan glared at the screen, her expression cold and unreadable. The scene before her had left no room for doubt. The truth was undeniable now—the Wens would have targeted Lotus Pier regardless of Wei Wuxian’s behaviour.

A sharp scoff escaped her lips, betraying the bitterness that churned within. Inwardly, her thoughts bristled with resentment, *‘So what, am I supposed to praise that brat for being utterly incapable of error?’* her jaw tightened. *‘Damn realizations! Damn brat!’*

Her grip tightened on her sleeves, the fabric straining under the pressure of her fingers, a tangible outlet for the storm raging within her. As much as her pride refused to yield, a small, unwelcome pang of guilt wormed its way into her heart. *‘Now the brat is trapped in the Burial Mounds…’*

In the twentieth year of Xuanzheng’s reign, the Yunmeng Jiang Clan met its devastating end. This marked a turning point in the chaos. The Qishan Wen Clan, emboldened by their growing dominion, became increasingly ruthless in their actions. Supervisory offices were established across the land. Any defiance, no matter how slight, was met with swift and brutal retribution. Villages burned, families were torn apart, and blood flowed like water, staining the ground in a crimson tide that seemed unending.

Each and every one of them felt a whirlwind of emotions—grief, rage, helplessness—all colliding with relentless intensity. For the Wens, killing and displaying their power were as easy as breathing. It was as if they thrived in the chaos they created, feeding off the fear and suffering they imposed upon others.

Their cruelty knew no limits, no boundaries. Many were relieved to have lived beyond the reach of their oppressive rule. If any of them had been born during the height of the Wens' power, they feared they wouldn't have survived. Even the younger disciples recognized their own limitations, knowing that if they had been thrust into the chaos of the Sunshot Campaign, they would have been powerless. Even now, they still relied heavily on their elders during night hunts.

Wen Qing, Wen Ning, and Sizhui carried the memory of their past. They had witnessed and experienced the cruelty and brutality firsthand. It scarred them to life. It was terrifying, it wasn't easy, and it was definitely something they would never forget.

"Jinlintai, Lanling City," The memory continued.

Madam Jin, Jin Zixuan, and Jin Ling straightened up.

Then, sounds of laughter filled the air—a chorus of carefree, mocking voices belonging to a group of women.

A low growl escaped Madam Jin's throat, her disdain unmistakable.

Jin Guangshan sat leisurely in a pavilion, surrounded on all sides by young girls adorned with the Jin's peonies delicately tucked into their hair.

Both Yu Ziyuan and Madam Jin shared a simultaneous scoff, their disdain perfectly aligned, though neither was surprised by the spectacle. Jin Zixuan exhaled slowly, disappointment etched deeply into his features, while Jin Ling stood frozen in disgust.

'This is my old man?' Jin Ling thought to himself. Stories of his grandfather had circulated through generations—none of them flattering—but witnessing the reality firsthand was another level entirely. *'No wonder Jiujiu's face scrunches up in disgust every time I bring him up. I get it now. The man's reputation is a mess, and now I have to live with the legacy.'*

"Clan Leader," one giggled, sitting on his lap and feeding him a cherry.

"Ew," Mianmian gagged, her face twisting in disgust.

"Second only to Wen Chao," Nie Huaisang quipped with a sly smirk.

"They probably share a handbook on how to be the worst," A-Qing added with dry sarcasm, raising an eyebrow.

"Clan Leader! Clan Leader!" a more frantic voice called out, urgency thick in the air.

Jin Zixuan followed the sound, his brow furrowing at the sight of the older disciple's terrified expression.

"What is it?" Jin Guangshan snapped, his tone sharp and impatient, his gaze darkening with irritation. "Did Lan Qiren come to persuade me to cooperate again? Tell him I'm out."

"What?" Lan Qiren muttered under his breath, his irritation rising quickly. He vividly recalled the countless times Jin Guangshan had dismissed his requests for an audience. To witness this scene only deepened his irritation towards Jin Guangshan.

"Of course he doesn't want to cooperate," Jiang Fengmian responded calmly. "He wants to be Wen Ruohan's lapdog—no spine, no loyalty, just empty ambition."

Lan Qiren's eyes narrowed at Jiang Fengmian's words. Of course, he knew this. The thought of Jin Guangshan's willingness to debase himself for power was nothing new.

Jiang Fengmian then continued, "Wen Ruohan feeds on weak men like Jin Guangshan. They offer him power without question, content to be pawns in his game."

"Well, he didn't just become a pawn," Nie Huaisang interjected with irritation. "He became the Chief Cultivator when Wen Ruohan died. It was the worst, serving a man like him who does not deserve such a title."

Jiang Fengmian's expression tightened slightly at the mention of Wen Ruohan, but he did not refute the truth of Nie Huaisang's words.

"N-No, Clan Leader," the disciple stammered, his voice trembling with urgency. "It's about Qishan. The Qishan Wen Clan has sent a message."

"Ah? What is it?"

Nie Mingjue snapped, his tone sharp and biting. "Hah! You really are Wen Ruohan's lapdog!"

"They… want to establish a supervisory office here."

"So it has come to this," Madam Jin murmured under her breath, her voice tinged with weariness. It was already obvious from the previous memory that the Wen Clan's supervisory office will extended far beyond Yunmeng, imposing their control over other clans as well.

"You'll have to submit all our great weapons within five days," the disciple added, his voice faltering. "Or… or…."

"Or what?" Jin Guangshan finally broke his silence, frowning.

“Or we will face the same fate… as the Jiang Clan of Yunmeng.”

Jin Guangshan merely sighed, a weary, almost dismissive sound. “No need for that. Send word to His Excellency. I would like to meet with him.”

“You are the worst,” Jin Ling muttered under his breath, his fists clenched tightly in anger. Lan Qiren, no doubt, had sought an audience with his grandfather to establish alliances—to fight against the Wens and perhaps organize a search party for Wei Wuxian and his jiujiu. His Dajiu was still out there, trapped in the Burial Mounds, enduring unbearable suffering and pain! The thought of his Dajiu suffering alone while one clan is hesitating gnawed at his soul.

‘What the hell are you doing?! Do something!’ he thought furiously, his gaze burning with frustration as he looked at his despicable grandfather.

Cangse Sanren scoffed, her voice sharp and mocking. “Yeah, I agree, Nie Mingjue. He truly is a lapdog. I should’ve punched him harder in the past.”

“What? You fought with him?” Wei Changze asked, his eyes widening in surprise.

“Who didn’t she fight in the past, is the right question,” Lan Qiren interjected, sighing heavily with exasperation.

The world around them then started to fade into the black of night. The only sound in the tranquil landscape was the rushing of one of the Cloud Recesses’ waterfalls.

“We’re back in Gusu,” Madam Lan whispered, her face lighting up a bit.

Meanwhile, the sight filled Lan Xichen with an intense homesickness. Although they had been inside the simulation for hours already, it truly felt like years had passed.

Guqin music rang through the air as Lan Wangji's experienced hands began to strum. The player's talent was undeniable.

"Ah, Lan-xiong, it sounds so nice~" Nie Huaisang commented, an appreciator of the arts as always.

"Not for entertainment," Lan Wangji responded.

A moment later, the meaning behind those words became clear. Lan Wangji was playing inquiry, pulling in spirits from all around to answer his call. Glowing balls of condensed spiritual energy began gathering around him, attracted to the sound like crows to jewels.

At the end of a riverbank just outside the Cloud Recesses, Lan Wangji sat and played, joined only by a single Lan elder. Once the spirits came into range, they began floating idly around him, observing the area.

One of the first things they noticed was the clarity bell presented to them on a nearby rock.

At the reminder of what had happened to Wei Wuxian, all of the cultivators' mood faltered.

After all, no one could survive the Burial Mounds. It didn't matter what those civilians in the first segment said; it was suicide to go there. But somehow, Wei Wuxian survived. They did not know how he did, but it was really a miracle. However, it's also kind of sad and worrying as they knew what will happen next. What might come out of the Burial Mounds soon will soon be the hero and the nightmare of the cultivation world.

Having given the spirits ample time to observe the bell, Lan Wangji finally asked his question.

He waited, and one of the spirits ventured forward to answer.

It bounced lightly on a guqin string, then backed off.

Lan Wangji, Lan Xichen, and Lan Qiren's face fell.

Qingheng-jun also sighed in disappointment.

"What does it say?" Madam Lan asked, but Qingheng-jun only shook his head.

Footsteps began to approach, and he instantly turned towards them.

Qingheng-jun and Lan Qiren tensed, praying that there wouldn't be an intruder aiming for Wangji.

Silently, Lan Wangji stood up, preparing for a possible confrontation with the intruder. A moment later, a man stepping into the clearing, and Lan Wangji's tension instantly switched to shock.

"Xiongzhang," Lan Wangji breathed out, relief rushing into him at once.

"Sect Leader Lan is back!" Jingyi's voice rang out with genuine joy.

"Welcome back, Sect Leader Lan!" Zizhen echoed, his expression bright with relief.

"It's so good to see you safe, Sect Leader Lan," Sizhui added, his smile warm and comforting.

"I am grateful for your concern," Lan Xichen said softly.

“Da-gongzi!” the Lan disciple beside Lan Wangji proclaimed, his entire demeanor lighting up. And indeed, Lan Xichen stood before them, looking completely unharmed.

Madam Lan, Qingheng-jun, and Lan Qiren simultaneously sighed in relief. This whole time, they had not wondered, but only waited—waited for Xichen to appear after he had managed to escape. To see him unharmed was a rare comfort amidst the chaos that surrounded them.

Qingheng-jun gently placed his hand on Lan Xichen’s shoulder, giving it a firm yet reassuring grip, as if to silently convey the unspoken words: *‘Thank God, you’re okay.’*

Lan Qiren and Lan Wangji also felt the same way.

Madam Lan’s eyes shimmered with unshed tears, her lips trembling slightly as she reached out to gently touch her son’s face.

Lan Xichen smiled softly, his heart swelling with affection for his family.

“Wangji,” Lan Xichen greeted. “I trust you’ve been well.”

A moment later, Lan Wangji managed to ease the shock on his face and return to his usual blank expression. He bowed lowly, saluting his brother.

“Xiongzhang,” he whispered.

No one else could perceive it, but the unmistakable relief lingering on his brother’s face brought a surge of warmth to Lan Xichen’s heart. He then moved closer to his younger brother, as though offering a silent, comforting gesture.

Surprisingly, despite Lan Wangji's usual reserved demeanor and the limited expression of affection he showed toward his older brother, he subtly leaned in closer to Lan Xichen, mirroring his actions in a rare moment of connection.

Lan Xichen's smile softened, acknowledging the unspoken gesture. Though Lan Wangji rarely exhibited outward displays of emotion, this small act spoke volumes in its own quiet way.

"I heard someone playing inquiry and knew it was you," Lan Xichen commented, then hesitated. "It seems Wei-gongzi is still missing."

Cangse Sanren and Wei Changze clenched their fists at the reminder.

"But it's so strange," the unknown Lan disciple muttered. "It's been several days, and we've found plenty of information regarding Jiang-gongzi, but nothing about Wei-gongzi. Has he been caught by the Wen Clan or not?"

Mianmian's earlier gasp of shock was shared by many. "Several days?" she repeated, her voice tinged with disbelief and worry.

Xiao Xingchen's brow furrowed deeply, his concern evident in his voice. "If he's been there this long…" he trailed off, unable to finish the thought.

"A-Ying," Cangse Sanren whimpered, her voice breaking.

'Even though Lan Wangji possesses unparalleled spiritual prowess, summoning all the spirits from the places he traverses would ultimately prove futile,' Nie Huaisang thought solemnly. The true spirits he seeks reside within the Burial Mounds. Even someone as gifted as him would find it a daunting challenge to penetrate such malevolence.

"Lan-er-gongzi has been asking everyone we see, including the deceased, but there hasn't been a single clue about Wei-gongzi. It's like he just disappeared," one cultivator

murmured with a heavy sigh.

Graceful as ever, Lan Wangji remained composed despite the somber situation. With a steady hand, he reached forward to gently pick up Wei Wuxian's clarity bell.

Staring down at the clarity bell, Lan Wangji's voice was calm but resolute, "Whether he's dead or alive, there will be clues somewhere. We will find an answer."

The certainty in his tone resonated through the group. Cangse Sanren, her voice barely a whisper, bowed slightly in gratitude. Wei Changze and the other cultivators who had grown close to Wei Wuxian followed suit, their heads lowered in silent respect.

Lan Wangji offered a single, composed nod in acknowledgment, yet a quiet discomfort lingered beneath his calm exterior. His past actions had not earned such gratitude, but perhaps it was not solely his efforts they were thanking. Perhaps, in their eyes, his unwavering determination and refusal to give up on Wei Wuxian were what truly mattered.

After a deliberate pause, Lan Wangji turned with practiced grace. With a fluid sweep of his sleeve, the gathered spirits dispersed into the wind, their presence fading like echoes of a memory. He bowed slightly to the spirits, his quiet gratitude conveyed without words.

"Wei-gongzi is strong and clever," Lan Xichen remarked, his tone carrying a gentle reassurance that felt more like hope than certainty. "He'll be fine."

"Yes," Jiang Yanli agreed, her voice soft and trembling as she nodded. "He'll be fine. He will be." Yet, despite her words, they sounded hollow—less a statement of faith and more an attempt to convince herself of their truth.

"He survived the Xuanwu Cave," a cultivator piped up, his voice strained.

“But this is different,” Wen Qing snapped, her frustration palpable. “The Xuanwu Cave was a challenge of endurance and wit. The Burial Mounds? It’s a pit of unrelenting malevolence! No one survives that! I don’t even wanna know how he survive being trapped in there.”

“Don’t underestimate him,” Jiang Wanyin argued. “Wei Wuxian is no ordinary cultivator. He always finds a way.”

“And how exactly will he do that?” Wen Qing countered sharply. “This isn't a remote battlefield where strength and strategy suffice, nor a forest where he can simply forage for sustenance. This is the Burial Mounds. Do you truly believe even Wei Wuxian can face that on his own?”

“Lady Wen is right,” Nie Huaisang added, his expression unusually solemn. “Even if Wei-xiong is a prodigy, unmatched in intellect and skill, the Burial Mounds are no ordinary place. The overwhelming evil there isn’t something that can be reasoned with or conquered by talent alone. Facing it alone is like daring fate itself. No matter how brilliant or skilled, no one could walk away from such a place unscathed.”

Nie Huaisang’s words only increased everyone’s worry.

Lan Wangji’s gaze fell to the ground, unresponsive.

Seeing that his earlier reassurance had failed to ease the tension, Lan Xichen pressed on, his tone steady yet concerned. “A few months ago, I heard that you and Uncle had begun efforts to unite the clans. How much progress have you managed to achieve?”

Yu Ziyuan and Jiang Fengmian perked up, their interest evident.

“Most clans remain hesitant and have yet to make any definitive commitments,” Lan Wangji responded, his voice calm and measured.

Lan Qiren scoffed, his frustration barely concealed. He understood all too well why some clans hesitated—fear of reprisal from the Wens was a heavy burden to bear. However, in times of such dire crisis, hesitation and fear could not be afforded. Without unity, the clans stood no chance of reclaiming their autonomy or protecting the very ideals they sought to uphold.

“Cowards,” Nie Mingjue snapped.

On the other hand, unaware that the Sunshot Campaign would be successful, Lan Xichen seemed to deflate at the clans’ hesitance.

“That isn’t a surprise,” he admitted. “The Qishan Wen clan is powerful. They destroyed the Yunmeng Jiang Clan in a single night. Not every clan will have the courage to face them.”

“Well, there is someone,” one cultivator said cautiously, his tone heavy with implication.

“If the person you’re referring to is the same one I’m thinking of right now,” Sizhui began, his voice steady but tinged with curiosity, “is it true he wiped out the Wens in just one night?”

The cultivator hesitated, his expression darkening slightly before he replied, “It wasn’t only one night… but yes, he did kill a significant number in that single night.”

The weight of his words settled over the room like a cold mist, sending a collective shiver down the spines of those listening.

The younger disciples exchanged uneasy glances, their expressions a mix of awe and fear.

“Unbelievable,” Jingyi murmured under his breath.

“And terrifying,” Zizhen then added quietly.

The dark clouds which had covered the moon were swept away. Moonlight entered the grotto in which the Lans stood, allowing their white robes to shine in the night. Seeing the sweet glow, Lan Wangji couldn't help but be reminded of the playful gleam in Wei Wuxian's silver eyes.

Lan Wangji lifted his gaze, his voice calm but resolute, "The Wen Clan's power will not endure forever."

Hearing his words, Lan Xichen's lips curved into a subtle, knowing smile.

Qingheng-jun and Lan Qiren's expressions softened with approval as they regarded Lan Wangji, a glimmer of pride in their gazes.

Suddenly, a voice broke through the solemn atmosphere.

"Just wait until Wei Wuxian shows up! He will kill all of you!" a cultivator shouted, his words ringing with fervor. The room stirred, and soon others began to echo his cry, their voices rising in a chorus of desperate hope.

Baoshan Sanren, who had been silently observing, turned her piercing gaze upon the crowd. Her expression was a mixture of calm and quiet disdain. Slowly, her eyes swept over each person in the room.

"You ridiculed him, and now you cheer for him, as though your words were not daggers in his back. Do you all have no shame, or do you simply bend to the winds of power and convenience?" she said, her voice steady but laced with reproach.

The cultivators who had been cheering just moments ago immediately fell silent. Their heads lowered in shame, their expressions guilty and subdued, intimidated by Baoshan Sanren's piercing gaze.

“Tell me, how many of you would stand with him now, not as spectators, but as allies willing to risk everything?” She paused. No one responded immediately, but she knew—she could see it in their eyes—the few who might be willing to stand by Wei Wuxian’s side.

“Of course, now you’re eager to call yourselves allies because you’re starting to glimpse the truth. However, what right do you all have to cheer for him now? Is he someone you can simply embrace as a savior, after having cast him aside when he needed you all most? When the world turned against him, where were your voices of support? Were you there to defend him, to stand by him through the darkest moments?”

The room remained quiet, each cultivator contemplating her words, their faces a mixture of regret and contemplation. Some shifted uneasily, while others looked down, unable to meet her gaze.

“Good,” Baoshan Sanren remarked, her back turned to them. "Your support is as insubstantial as hollow words from a deceitful merchant.”

Now, the memory was transported back to Gusu, inside the Lan Clan Conference Hall. Dozens of Sect Leaders from minor and major sects were seated around, and Lan Qiren stood in the center.

“Everyone,” he greeted sternly. “The Qishan Wen Clan has pushed us too far. If you continue to stand back, you’ll soon find yourselves in the line of fire.”

As they listened, the other sect leaders made eye contact with each other.

Then, a laugh.

“Lan-xiansheng, our presence here proves we want to discuss it. It’s just….”

“Sect Leader Jin, what are you trying to say?”

“Don’t spout nonsense, A-Die,” Jin Zixuan whispered. Praying to god that his father will not provoke Lan Qiren.

Madam Jin seems to be having the same thought as she glared at her husband, crossing her arms, anticipating what he’s going to say.

But Jin Guangshan merely fluttered his fan delicately, explaining, “In my humble opinion, we shouldn’t be too hasty in fighting against the Wen Clan. It may be bad timing.”

“Just say you’re a coward,” Cangse Sanren cursed.

Yu Ziyuan, for once, thought the same.

“I agree,” another Sect Leader said. “We still have time to think it through.”

As he spoke the scene was switched to the path leading to the conference hall, where a hooded figure walked with Lan Xichen. The figure’s face was shrouded in shadow, but their stride was confident and sure.

“Who is that?” Jingyi asked, curious.

“Maybe someone Sect Leader Lan knows?” Zizhen responded.

“No, I think I know who that is,” Sizhui said, his eyes turning to a certain someone.

The sect leader continued, “If we really provoke Wen Ruohan, then there’s no way out.”

“Timing?” Lan Qiren repeated, his tone sharp. “A way out? You’re suggesting we surrender our treasures and live under their supervision?”

A deep, mocking laughter echoed through the room in response to his words.

“Forgive me for being blunt,” Nie Mingjue began, his tone unyielding. “But if we hand over our weapons and techniques to Wen Ruohan, we’ll be nothing more than lambs waiting for slaughter!”

“He’s not wrong,” Song Lan agreed, his expression stoic.

Jiang Fengmian clenched his fists.

As they spoke to each other, the sect leader who had commented huffed in indignation at Nie Mingjue.

“How dare-”

“Now, now,” Jin Guangshan placated. “Everyone calm down. I just mean we should avoid direct confrontation. Qingheng-jun was also powerful, and the Gusu Lan clan is one of the strongest, but the end result of the Wens' attack remained as expected.”

The door swung open.

“Thank you for your generous praise,” Lan Xichen said, voice alight with easy humor. “In my opinion, a lack of capabilities isn’t an excuse to avoid one’s enemies.”

Madam Lan, Qingheng-jun, Nie Mingjue, and Cangse Sanren couldn’t agree more.

Jingyi, ever eager to agree with his senior, chimed in enthusiastically, “That’s right! Running away doesn’t solve anything!”

“Yeah!” Jin Ling added with fiery determination. “You can’t simply surrender to Wen’s power and dominance like this! Don’t be cowards, you little shits!”

“A-Ling, don’t curse.”

“Sorry, A-Die. It had to be said.”

Lan Qiren’s face lit up into a genuine smile when he saw who had arrived.

“From what you just said,” Lan Xichen continued, “does the Lanling Jin clan plan to surrender and serve the Wen clan?”

Nie Mingjue’s lips curled into a smirk as he exchanged a knowing glance with Lan Xichen. *‘Someone like him needed to hear those words,’* he thought, barely containing his satisfaction at the directness of the question.

The room fell silent, a tension settling over the gathered sect leaders and disciples. Some of the younger disciples exchanged wide-eyed looks of disbelief. Lan Xichen, known for his gentle demeanor and diplomatic nature, had rarely ever confronted anyone so bluntly. To see it was very surprising.

“What?” Jin Guangshan instantly backed up, clearing his throat and looking away.

Jin Zixuan smirked. He may be Jin Guangshan’s son, but he was definitely pleased by this.

“Greetings Uncle, clan leaders,” Lan Xichen bowed.

“Xichen. I heard that you were coming back. Why are you so late?” Lan Qiren asked.

Lan Xichen responded, “Ah, I had to deal with something on my way back. I’m sorry I caused you to worry.”

Lan Xichen frowned, remembering the ‘*something’* he had to deal with.

Lan Qiren extended a hand and placed it gently on Lan Xichen’s shoulder. “It’s alright. I’m glad you’ve returned. It’s been… months. I’m sure it hasn’t been easy for you.”

“You’re the one who’s had to work hard,” Xichen replied, smiling warmly.

“Lan-gongzi!” someone interrupted snidely. “That’s easy for you to say, but the Yunmeng Jiang Clan put up a fight recklessly and ended up being destroyed!”

Yu Ziyuan frowned, her lips curling into a scornful sneer, "Recklessly? Do you call defending one’s home and people reckless? Or is it easier for cowards to label courage as folly, just so they can sleep at night?"

As Yu Ziyuan’s words echoed in the room, Jiang Fengmian felt a torrent of thoughts invade his mind, each one more agonizing than the last. He should have returned sooner. They should have been better prepared. They should have fought back harder. The regrets piled upon each other, a relentless cascade of "what-ifs" and "should-haves" that offered no solace.

Then, the hooded figure scoffed.

“So you’re saying that if there’s no chance of victory you’re willing to submit to the Qishan Wen Clan?”

“Wait a minute-”

“That voice!” Jiang Yanli stood.

“Who are you?!” one of the sect leaders demanded, his voice sharp with suspicion.

In response, the cloaked figure reached up and pushed back the hood, revealing Jiang Cheng standing tall and resolute.

“A-Cheng!” Jiang Yanli exclaimed, her voice breaking with both joy and relief. Her face lit up, and she clasped her hands together, unable to contain her happiness.

Jiang Fengmian exhaled deeply, the tension in his posture melting away as relief flooded his features. He could feel his chest swell with pride at the sight of his son, standing firm and composed.

Even Yu Ziyuan allowed a rare moment of softness to cross her face. Her sharp eyes traced over Jiang Cheng, taking in his confident stance and the way he held himself with the authority of a true leader.

“Jiang-xiong!”

“Jiujiu!”

The energy in the room shifted as smiles broke out among the gathered cultivators.

Well, for most of them.

Wei Changze narrowed his eyes slightly. *‘He’s not suicidal anymore,’* he noted inwardly, his gaze lingering on Jiang Wanyin’s steady posture. Then his eyes turned to the current Jiang Wanyin, observing him as well.

Unmistakable evidence revealed itself—Jiang Cheng's spiritual core was restored.

He was not happy about this in the slightest, especially Cangse Sanren.

"Sect Leader Jiang!" The simulated sect leaders reacted in shock.

Despite the painful reminder of the Jiang Clan's fall, Yu Ziyuan couldn't help but smile inwardly. Her son, after all, was undeniably worthy of such a title.

Jiang Fengmian, however, did not share her sentiment. He felt conflicted. To him, the weight of that title carried burdens far heavier than any sense of pride could justify. His son was still too young to bear the responsibilities of leadership, and the circumstances that had thrust him into this role were far from ideal. Leadership should have been something Jiang Cheng grew into gradually, not something forced upon him by the destruction of their clan and the weight of survival.

Though proud of his son's resilience, Jiang Fengmian is still worried for him.

"Of course you can say such things! The Yunmeng Jiang Clan has already been destroyed!" Sect Leader Yao yelled, causing Jiang Wanyin's mouth to switch into a scowl. "We're different! We need to protect our clansmen!"

"Right," Jiang Wanyin forced his mouth into a smirk. "Everyone has different ideas. You may think it's fine to make slaves and prostitutes of your people, and you may be willing to do and tolerate anything for as long as you continue to live."

Nie Mingjue crossed his arms, leaning back slightly as he watched the heated exchange unfold on the screen.

A sharp smirk tugged at the corner of his mouth as Jiang Cheng's biting retort hit home, responding, "Well, that's one way to shut someone up."

Lan Xichen's lips twitched in amusement, adding, "He certainly has a way with words."

Jiang Wanyin smiled at Lan Xichen's remark.

Madam Jin then scoffed, "Sometimes a good verbal slap is more effective than sugarcoated nonsense. Sect Leader Yao definitely deserves it."

Jingyi, perched nearby, snorted. "Did you see his face? I thought his nose was going to start bleeding from sheer indignation."

"How do you even respond to that," Zizhen wondered, chuckling beside Jingyi.

The sect leader reacted in indignation, standing up.

"Jiang Cheng!" Sect Leader Yao shouted. "Don't push your luck! You're trying so hard to persuade us. You just want to seek revenge even if it means taking us down with you!"

"That's right! I want revenge!"

"A-Cheng," Jiang Yanli whispered mournfully. Jiang Cheng turned his gaze toward her, his expression faltering for a moment under the weight of her concern. She knew her younger brother shouldn't be burdened with thoughts like this.

Revenge wasn't surprising to her—it was a natural response to the pain they'd endured—but it was dangerous. Even though she was aware of some of the events that had unfolded prior to the Sunshot Campaign, she couldn't help but fear for him.

Jiang Wanyin then gave his sister a small, fleeting smile—one that didn't quite reach his eyes—before turning his attention back to the screen. The desperation lingering in his gaze was so profound, so raw, that it was almost unbearable, heart-breaking to witness.

Jiang Wanyin took a deep breath, his jaw tightening with determination as he hissed, "As long as I can destroy the Wen Clan, I'm willing to do anything! If you don't have the courage to join me, then sit back and wait for Wen Ruohan to crush you!"

The room grew tense as some cultivators began whispering in agreement.

"Right," Jin Zixuan nodded, his expression firm. "Stand up for what you believe is right. Honestly, father was so foolish to avoid confrontation. If we don't fight back now, what will be left of us?"

"Couldn't agree more," Madam Jin added smoothly, her voice steady and composed.

Jiang Wanyin's face contorted slightly at the sound of his brother-in-law's support. He cringed inwardly, not quite comfortable with the notion of having family express approval for his fierce stance.

Lan Xichen raised a hand, calmly yet firmly reminding Jiang Wanyin to tone it back. "Wen Ruohan is suspicious and cautious. We all know that. If we compromise now, we will only invite greater trouble in the future."

"Well said!" Nie Mingjue slammed his cup onto the table with a decisive thud. "I'll make this clear right now. Whether you join me or not, I swear I will kill Wen Ruohan!"

"So passionate," Nie Huaisang teased, leaning back with a mischievous grin.

Nie Mingjue shot him a sharp glare, his expression colder than ever, “Watch your tongue, Huaisang. I don’t have time for your teasing.”

Nie Huaisang shrugged, feigning innocence, “I’m just stating facts. Someone has to keep things light around here, don’t you think?”

“This should have been the right mindset to have at the time,” Song Lan chimed in.

“I agree,” Lan Xichen added thoughtfully.

Nodding once, Lan Xichen saluted Nie Mingjue, saying, “Sect Leader Nie is a righteous man. I’m impressed by your courage. Our Gusu Lan Clan will do the same.”

Qingheng-jun let out a heavy sigh, his shoulders slumping. He had died too early. If only he had been alive during those desperate times, he would have stood beside them. Yet, knowing how he had withdrawn from the cultivation world, he doubted he would have ever joined the war.

Still, the regret gnawed at him. He wasn’t strong enough to defend his home, to protect his family, His sons, his brother, the ones left behind, had faced a battle that he could not protect them from. It was a painful reminder of his limitations, a failure that lingered like an unyielding shadow.

“Lan Clan did not have enough manpower, and we were caught off guard during the attack,” Lan Qiren said.

Qingheng-jun snapped from his thoughts and let out a slow breath, his lips curving into a small, almost imperceptible smile. A flicker of relief washed over him. There was comfort in knowing that the circumstances were beyond his control, that it wasn’t his fault that the Lan Clan was defeated.

Jin Guangshan anxiously began to look around.

Seeing Jin Guangshan's unease, Lan Qiren's voice cut through the growing anxiety. "Anyone who decides to join us should speak now, here, before the whole world. If one hesitates and joins halfway through, we will need to discuss whether they should be rewarded or punished once the fighting ends."

Jin Guangshan's scanning eyes came to an abrupt halt, his gaze locking onto Lan Qiren. For a moment, he seemed lost for words.

"How can we possibly win against Wen Ruohan with just the clans that are present?" Jin Guangshan finally managed, his voice strained with skepticism.

Wen Ruohan was an exceptionally powerful cultivator. His mastery over cultivation, combined with his unyielding ambition, had elevated him to the position of chief cultivator. Yet, even among his formidable strength, the presence of Wen Zhuliu on his side was an entirely different matter.

These two together in a battlefield would be unstoppable.

Cangse Sanren's frustration bubbled to the surface, scowling, "That cowardice will kill you someday!"

"That's why he's dead," Madam Jin said, her expression nonchalant.

However, Lan Xichen didn't miss a beat and steadily responded, "The Wen Clan may be powerful, but their people are not as loyal as they think. We can persuade the clans they have enslaved to join us."

And yet, Jin Guangshan continued to hesitate, his sharp eyes betraying an undercurrent of doubt.

Observing the exchange, Sizhui quietly reflected to himself, '*A-Ling's courage must undoubtedly come from Sect Leader Jiang.*'

"But I doubt any of them would take the risk of fighting against the Wen Clan."

Lan Xichen's expression did not falter. Instead, he let out a pleasant, almost knowing laugh. Without a word, he raised his hand, gesturing toward the doors.

"Perhaps you should see for yourself," Lan Xichen said, his voice laced with quiet confidence.

The scene change, bringing them outside to a nearby hill overlooking the grounds below the conference chamber. What they saw made the assembled clan leaders rise to their feet in stunned silence.

Hundreds of cultivators were marching up the hill in orderly ranks. The sound of synchronized footsteps and rustling robes filled the air. As the group drew nearer, their banners became visible, representing various smaller clans.

Mianmian's eyes widened, her earlier anxiousness momentarily eclipsed by astonishment. "This… this is…" she stammered, unable to fully articulate her disbelief.

"Is this for real?" Madam Lan whispered, her voice trembling with a mixture of relief and awe as her gaze swept over the gathering forces.

"How did you manage to gather so many clans in such a short amount of time?" he asked, his tone laced with disbelief.

For months, Lan Xichen had vanished. The time he spent away could not be called short, but neither did it feel like an eternity—it was a delicate balance between urgency and meticulous preparation. Perhaps it was his determination to stand against the oppressive might of the Wen Clan that had driven him.

Lan Xichen turned to his father, and responded, “I couldn’t just do nothing while I escaped, so I thought of a plan.”

Nie Mingjue’s lips curved into a smirk, “That was really a good plan, Xichen,” he praised, approval evident in his tone. “The greater our numbers, the greater our chances of success. And this? This is a good start.”

As the gathered cultivators murmured amongst themselves, one unknown voice broke through the crowd. “Are they even strong enough to make a difference?” the cultivator asked, his doubt clear.

The question sparked irritation in Jingyi, who stepped forward with an annoyed huff. “Hey,” he began. “What kind of question is that? Does a clan need overwhelming strength to deserve a place in an alliance? Is that really what matters here?”

Sizhui, who had been quietly observing, stepped in to temper the rising tension. “Sometimes,” he began, his tone thoughtful, “what matters isn’t the power a clan holds, but the resolve in their hearts, the unity they bring, and the courage to fight against injustice.”

Lan Qiren nodded in agreement, his serene expression softening. Lan Sizhui is really the perfect embodiment of the Lan Clan’s ideals—graceful in demeanor, measured in thought, and unwavering in his sense of justice.

“God, how humiliating is this—that a child possesses more wisdom than you do,” Wen Qing whispered.

The cultivator in question fixed a sharp glare on Wen Qing, but before the tension could escalate, Wen Ning stepped forward, positioning himself as a shield and meeting the man’s gaze with an equally piercing glare.

Lan Xichen smiled faintly, his gaze fixed on the advancing forces. “The initial army of the Sunshot Campaign,” he said, his tone even, though a glimmer of satisfaction shone

in his eyes. “It seems that courage still exists in places one might least expect.”

The clans began to announce themselves.

“Ouyang Xin from Baling! The Qishan Wen Clan ruined our ancestral shrine and killed my clansmen! Thanks to Lan-er-gongzi, we were able to survive. Now, I bring with me hundreds of clasmen to join you!”

“Wang Jin from Runan! The Wen Clan killed my family and insulted my sisters. I came here at Lan-er-gongzi’s invitation! I swear to help destroy the Wen Clan!”

“Fu Huan from Hedong! Lan-er-gongzi helped me, too! I have over 200 people ready to join you!”

Some cultivators lowered their heads, their expressions reflecting a mix of shame and self-doubt. In this moment, with no alternative but to choose a side, they wondered whether they would find the courage to join the alliance—or if fear would prevent them from stepping forward. Perhaps they would, perhaps they wouldn’t. The uncertainty weighed heavily upon them, as the resolve of smaller clans stood in stark contrast to their hesitation. It was as though they were being exposed for their own cowardice, their reluctance to act against oppression laid bare by the unity and determination of those who refused to be subdued.

The room fell silent for a moment, and even Jin Guangshan’s mouth hung open in stunned disbelief.

Cangse Sanren couldn’t help but stifle a soft laugh as she watched Jin Guangshan’s astonished expression. The irony of his shocked face was too satisfying to ignore.

‘What now, Jin Guangshan?’ she thought with a wry smile. *‘Are you going to continue being Wen Ruohan’s lapdog, or will you finally acknowledge the reality? You don’t have a choice here anyway. Don’t humiliate yourself even further.’*

Jiang Wanyin crossed his arms, a smirk playing on his lips as he observed the scene unfold. “Look at him being speechless,” he remarked, his tone laced with amusement.

“It’s pleasant,” Jin Zixuan nodded in agreement.

Jiang Wanyin glanced at him, his brow furrowing. “What’s with you?” he asked, his voice tinged with exasperation.

“What?” Jin Zixuan asked, genuinely confused, his innocent demeanor only aggravating Jiang Wanyin further.

Jiang Wanyin sighed deeply, shaking his head as if to dismiss the conversation altogether. “Never mind,” he muttered, refusing to entertain the thought any further.

“Any more objections, Clan Leaders?” Lan Xichen asked, his voice calm yet firm. The announcements continued—“Sun Shan,” “Li Tong,” “Wu Ye,” and “Yang Zaihan”—each introducing themselves with confidence, but the message had already been made.

Jin Guangshan broke eye contact, his unease evident as he lowered his gaze.

“Great!” Nie Mingjue declared, stepping forward to address the entirety of the gathered crowd. “In the era of Five Emperors, ten suns caused the rivers to dry. The suffering the Wen Clan has brought is no less than that disaster! In ancient times, Da Yi shot down the suns to save the world.”

He stepped onto the stage, his voice growing louder, his presence commanding attention.

“You people who have gathered here are today’s Da Yi! We shall name this battle against the Wen Clan ‘*The Sunshot Campaign*!’”

He lifted his cup into the air, and a tremendous cheer erupted across the crowd, the energy spreading like wildfire.

Yet, despite the joyous celebration, there was an underlying tension. A few cultivators exchanged uneasy glances, their smiles faltering. Some knew the events of the Sunshot Campaign—the sacrifices, the losses, and the cost. And for those who had lived through it, the wounds were still fresh.

The shadow of *'that'* person loomed ever closer. For Lan Xichen and Nie Mingjue, the emotions surged like a tidal wave—bitterness for the betrayal they had endured, hatred, a longing, and an overwhelming sadness.

Then wind picked up, and the sky darkened to a stormy black. Crows cawed in the distance like harbingers of doom. An eerie creaking of wood resounded.

Cangse Sanren and Wei Changze quickly perked up, saying, "Wei Ying!" simultaneously.

Lan Wangji glared at the dark sky in the screen and cradled his unconscious husband tightly.

"He escaped, right?" Cangse Sanren asked with panic, turning to Jiang Wanyin, who refused to make eye contact with her.

At the dips between the mounds, bones littered the ground. There seemed to be a new skull two feet in any direction. In the distance, there was a trace of movement along the ground.

The figure blended into the shadows behind them, but their dusty red ribbon gave them away.

Slowly, Wei Wuxian continued to crawl forward. All around him, the spirits which made up the Burial Mounds' potent resentful energy whispered and giggled in his ears.

He could barely keep his eyes open.

“He’s still here,” Wei Changze gasped, his voice trembling. “Wei Ying…”

Once again, even through the screen, the atmosphere in the Burial Mounds felt stifling. The oppressive energy seemed to weigh heavily upon them, making each breath a struggle.

An unknown cultivator demanded impatiently, “Can’t he stand! He has to—”

“He was thrown from the cliff!” Lan Wangji interjected, his tone firm and edged with frustration. The sheer ignorance behind the question grated on him. How could they fail to see the gravity of Wei Ying’s condition? Wei Ying was injured—gravely so—and no amount of pleading for him to flee or escape would change that. Questioning why he cannot stand is utterly senseless!

“Look at him,” Wen Qing snapped, glaring at the man. “If you think his condition allows him to move, then you’re either blind or a fool. And if that isn’t clear enough for you, let me remind you—he was already injured before he was thrown into the Burial Mounds. His body hasn’t even begun to recover.”

Yu Ziyuan, standing to the side, clenched her fists tightly, her face rigid as she fought not to react outwardly. The mention of Wei Ying’s prior injuries struck a nerve she couldn’t ignore.

Wei Wuxian’s fingers clawed into the dirt, trembling as he dragged himself forward inch by inch, the effort wringing every last ounce of strength from his battered body. The cacophony of hisses and shrieks echoed around him, filling his ears with a symphony of torment.

Wei Wuxian lay flat against the ground, barely able to move. The crushing weight of the resentful energy bore down on him like an iron vice, suffocating and inescapable. This wasn’t

just pain—it was agony beyond comprehension. His body was a battlefield of injuries: whipped, choked, slammed into the ground, beaten mercilessly by Wen Chao's disciples. The core-melting hand had hit him, and got thrown in, top it all off.

Were any of his bones still intact? He could barely breathe. Was his ribcage fractured? Had a rib punctured a lung? And his limbs—he wasn't sure if his arm was broken, his leg shattered, or if a concussion was threatening to steal what little consciousness he had left. Worst of all, the suffocating resentment around him gnawed at his already fragile state.

"Damn it, damn it, damn it!" Cangse Sanren's voice trembled with rage and despair. Tears blurred her vision, but her fury burned clear. Why him? Why my son? Out of all the cultivators living their lives without a care, why does he have to suffer the most?! He has a heart of gold—a kind, selfless child. Why must the world break him like this?

All of the cultivators kept silent, reflecting their collective guilt.

Beside her, Wei Changze's expression was equally tormented. His hands shook as he fought to keep himself together, but the pain in his chest was unbearable. His boy—his lively, mischievous, brilliant boy—reduced to this. The thought of Wei Wuxian enduring such horrors felt like a blade to his heart.

Cangse Sanren's panic turned to anger, her voice a sharp cry. "That damned Wen Clan! Wen Chao! If I could—" She cut herself off, choking on her words as tears spilled freely down her face.

Wei Changze didn't hesitate to embrace her tightly. His lips trembled. Is this it? Is this when *it* happens?

Yiling Laozu…

A hand snatched Wei Wuxian's ankle.

Some disciples screamed.

Wei Wuxian was jerked back, pulled in as the arm sank deeper and deeper into the dirt. It was a fierce corpse, buried under the ground Wei Wuxian had just crawled over.

Wei Wuxian kicked at it and tried to stand.

Nearby resentful energy reacted to Wei Wuxian's movement, condensing into another arm and grabbing the leg trying to kick the corpse away.

Wei Wuxian gasped out.

Jiang Yanli panicked, "A-Xian, run—"

But his movement had attracted more spirits' attention.

They swarmed.

"No!"

"Wei Ying!"

"Wei Wuxian!"

Thousands of fierce ghosts attacked at once, slamming into his body like a tidal wave. Their screams grew in volume, and they flooded Wei Wuxian's blood with their hate.

Cangse Sanren and Wei Changze darted all the way to the screen, but could do nothing to interfere.

“Get lost!” Wei Wuxian’s voice rang out, hoarse and broken. “All of you, leave!”

The spirits responded with malicious laughter, their voices intertwining into a cacophony of mockery. Their sinister chuckles echoed through the Burial Mounds, taunting his pain, feeding on his despair.

Jiang Wanyin stood frozen, his fists clenched tightly at his sides. His nails bit into his palms, drawing blood, but he didn’t care. His jaw tightened painfully as he fought to keep his emotions at bay.

He despised it—the mocking laughter reverberating around him, clawing at his ears and tearing at his composure. How dare they? How dare they torment his brother like this?! Rage boiled in Jiang Wanyin’s chest, but beneath it was a bitter, gnawing hypocrisy. What right did he have to feel such anger when his own words and actions in the past had inflicted harm on Wei Wuxian? He could shout apologies into the void for eternity, and it still wouldn’t mend the fractures he had caused or erase the indelible scars etched into Wei Wuxian’s soul.

Beside him, Jin Ling stood rigid. Frustration swirled within him as he stared at the screen. The sight of Wei Wuxian—battered, broken, and surrounded by those vile spirits—was unbearable. He wanted nothing more than to leap through the screen and slice through every last specter that dared to harm him. But he couldn’t. He was powerless, reduced to a mere spectator of his uncle’s torment. The feeling of helplessness churned in his gut, and tears pricked the corners of his eyes as memories flooded back—moments when Wei Wuxian had saved him, shielded him, and sacrificed for him.

Jin Ling’s heart twisted painfully as regret gripped him. How had he ever hated this man? How had he allowed his anger, his pride, and the poisonous words of others to blind him to the truth? Wei Wuxian had been nothing but selfless, always giving, always protecting—even at his own expense. And now, all Jin Ling could do was watch as the person who had once been his savior was dragged deeper into the abyss.

‘Please, please escape, Dajiu…’

A relentless storm of resentment swirled around Wei Wuxian, pulling in the most malicious of spirits and vengeful corpses. Each step forward was met with countless malevolent entities closing in, their grotesque forms looming over him with a hunger.

"Stop it!" Jiang Yanli's voice broke through the chaos. Her plea was filled with raw anguish, her eyes brimming with tears. Jin Zixuan and Jin Ling held her close, unable to look at the screen any further.

The corpses walked towards Wei Wuxian, and Wei Wuian fought to escape. However, no matter how hard he pushed off the ground or twisted, he couldn't move.

A corpse snatched his foot and yanked it close, nearly dislocating his knee and causing him to scream.

"A-Ying!" Cangse Sanren screamed.

Hearing the scream reminded Yu Ziyuan of the countless times she had punished Wei Wuxian for his recklessness. He never screamed when she reprimanded him; he endured in silence, his resilience and strength evident in his ability to withstand the harshest punishments without a single outcry. He bore his pain quietly.

But now, hearing his cries was a painful reminder that he wasn't enduring anymore. The walls he built around his emotions were crumbling, leaving nothing but vulnerability exposed.

Her heart throbbed with guilt.

Lan Qiren seemed to mirror her sentiments, his complexion turning ashen while his composure visibly faltered. Memories resurfaced of how he had frequently chastised Wei Wuxian for his rule-breaking, defiance, and seemingly reckless behavior. Each sharp rebuke and stern glare now seemed to amplify the burden of remorse that weighed heavily upon him.

Wei Wuxian lashed out with a fierce kick, breaking the corpse's hold on him, but the surge of resentful energy retaliated swiftly, invading his lungs like a suffocating tide.

The corpse, unyielding, staggered before regaining its stance and advancing once more, its movements unnervingly deliberate. The spectral forms trailing it writhed like a storm, encircling Wei Wuxian in a relentless vortex of malice.

With an eerie coordination, the spirits ascended high above the Burial Mounds, their dark forms outlined against the bleak sky.

A heartbeat later, they plunged downward.

Cangse Sanren and Jiang Yanli's anguished screams tore through the suffocating tension of the room. Some onlookers recoiled, unable to bear the sight, shielding their eyes as dread took root in their hearts. Others sat paralyzed, their faces pale and their breaths shallow, gripped by the horrifying spectacle unfolding before them. A few whispered prayers or gasped in disbelief, the sheer weight of despair and helplessness suffusing the atmosphere like an oppressive fog.

They all understood… this was merely the beginning of the torment Wei Wuxian was going to endure.

"Speechless now, are we?" Baoshan Sanren asked, her tone sharp and laced with disdain as her piercing eyes swept across the room, taking in the cultivators' reactions. "This is the so-called *'villain'* of the cultivation world? The monster you use to frighten children into obedience? The symbol of chaos and destruction you so vehemently condemned?"

Some cultivators shifted uncomfortably, their eyes avoiding her. Others clenched their fists, torn between guilt and indignation.

"But it was Wen Chao's fault! It was his decision to cast Wei Wuxian into the Burial Mounds that cemented his rise as the Yiling Laozu!" an unknown cultivator contended.

Baoshan Sanren's lips curved into a chilling smile, her gaze fixed firmly on the cultivator. "Wen Chao was at fault, there is no doubt. However, others played a role in his downfall. Your hands are not as pure as you like to believe."

Another cultivator interjected, "Yet, he welcomed destruction and chaos, embracing it as his weapon. How can we overlook that?"

Nie Huaisang rolled his eyes, a sarcastic smile flickering across his face, and responded, "Wow, how can one be so dumb? Did you even watch what happened earlier?"

"He was forced to embrace it," Jin Zixuan piped in. "There was no other option. What more is there to debate?"

Another cultivator chimed in, his tone more hesitant. "But does that justify the chaos he brought upon others? Innocents were caught in the crossfire. Can we ignore the damage done?"

Lan Qiren's voice was calm, yet tinged with regret. "Innocents suffered, yes. And it is a tragedy that cannot be erased. However, the destruction entirely not his doing. It was a result of those who fueled the fire, who refused to understand, who condemned without question."

He was one of them.

Baoshan Sanren's gaze shifted back to the screen, "The seeds of destruction were planted long before Wei Wuxian embraced them. The blame cannot be laid solely at his feet."

The tornado of resentful energy spiraled away into nothingness, leaving behind a tranquil white void suffused with crimson maple leaves gently drifting through the air. At the center of this ethereal landscape stood Wei Wuxian, his figure composed and his garments pristine, as though he had never been battered or worn down in the first place.

“What’s happening?” Madam Lan muttered.

“I’m just as confused,” Qingheng-jun admitted.

The only sound in the void was Wei Wuxian’s steady footsteps. Then, in a large sweep, the Lotus Pier formed. It was as lively and vibrant as it was before the Wens had ever shown up.

The Jiang Clan, along with a few other cultivators, gazed in somber awe at the remnants of what was once Lotus Pier. The beauty of their home had been undeniable. But now, all that remained were smoldering remnants and charred ashes.

Memories of joyous gatherings, intense trainings, and peaceful moments flooded their minds. Oh, how they miss their home already.

Wei Wuxian lifted his head, his vision blurry and unfocused, only to freeze at the sight before him. Up ahead, seated at a table, were Yu Ziyuan and Jiang Fengmian, their faces calm and unmarred by the shadows of their eventual fates. The soft, warm glow of the scene was so unlike anything he had known in years.

Behind him, the sound of light, carefree laughter caught his attention. Startled, he turned to see two children—himself and Jiang Cheng at no more than ten years old—dashing by with the boundless energy of youth.

“Wei Wuxian, come on!”

“Jiang Cheng, wait for me!”

What an unspeakably cruel thing to show a man who had already lost everything. A reminder of a time when his world was whole, his family intact, and the weight of survival had yet to

be placed upon his shoulders.

Jiang Fengmian turned to face the kids, and even Yu Ziyuan's face softened into a smile.

Seeing that, the teenage Wei Wuxian smiled warmly.

Yu Ziyuan's eyes widened, a flicker of disbelief crossing her face. It was strange seeing her expression so warm, so unfamiliar. Did she ever show such softness toward Wei Wuxian? She couldn't recall, not clearly—there had always been a distance, a coldness that had defined their interactions. Yet, here he was, painting a version of her she barely recognized: gentle, compassionate, and deeply empathetic.

Jiang Fengmian watched quietly from the side, a knowing look in his eyes.

"A-Xian," Jiang Yanli called out.

Wei Wuxian's eyes brightened at the sound, his expression softening further as he instinctively turned toward the source. To his right, an illusion of his thirteen-year-old self sat beside Jiang Yanli, the two of them sharing a simple meal.

"Slowly. Don't choke," she advised with the same tender care she had always shown him, her tone warm and motherly.

The younger Wei Wuxian grinned up at her, his cheeks stuffed with food. "I won't, Shijie! Thanks!" he replied, his voice bright with unrestrained cheer.

At the domestic scene, Jiang Yanli couldn't help but smile softly, a gentle warmth spreading across her face. Others around her began to mirror the same expression, their tensions easing as the familiar scene unfolded.

Cangse Sanren quietly observed the scene, her gaze softening as memories resurfaced. She recalled how Wei Ying used to be like that too. A sense of gratitude settled within her as she thought of Jiang Yanli—the one person who had genuinely tried to understand Wei Ying, who had cared for him with the tenderness of a true sibling.

As Wei Wuxian began to step closer, his surroundings rippled and shifted, transforming into the roof of the Cloud Recesses. It was the scene from years ago—a younger Wei Wuxian, only fifteen, standing across from Lan Wangji for the first time.

“Here! Emperor’s smile!” Wei Wuxian offered with a carefree grin, holding out a jug of wine.

“Drinking is forbidden here.”

Lan Wangji stared intently at the screen, a quiet melancholy lingering in his gaze. Despite the weight of the memories, a subtle smile would occasionally curve his lips.

They could have had a more conventional first meeting—a formal introduction, perhaps, where words were carefully chosen and propriety observed. Yet, as the memory played out once more, Lan Wangji couldn’t help but feel that this unconventional meeting, was far more meaningful. Every glance, every touch, and every unspoken exchange, this moment was one that could never be replaced, an experience uniquely theirs.

On the side, Lan Qiren sigh exasperatedly seeing the memory before him.

Then, Lan Wangji turned towards them.

“Wei Ying!” he shouted.

The illusion shattered before their eyes, the vivid scene dissolving into nothingness as Wei Wuxian’s eyes shot open, wide with surprise and confusion.

“He’s awake,” Wen Ning whispered softly, his voice barely audible.

But Wen Qing shook her head, her expression somber. “That doesn’t make things any better,” she said quietly.

All around him, waves of resentful energy surged into Wei Wuxian’s body. With every attempt to move, the energy would violently erupt, sending trees crashing to the ground and clouds of dust into the air. As the dust settled, Wei Wuxian’s body hovered unnaturally, lifted by the sheer force of the malevolent energy.

Suddenly, two arms formed from the swirling resentment reached out, intertwining their ghostly fingers with Wei Wuxian’s. More arms emerged from the darkness, wrapping around his chest, squeezing him tighter with each passing second, as though trying to absorb his very essence. Nearby fierce corpses clawed desperately, their expressions twisted with hunger, reaching up like worshippers in a desperate plea for whatever scraps the spirits left behind.

“It’s pulling him in!” Jingyi cried out in panic.

“Get away from Senior Wei!” Zizhen shouted desperately, his eyes wide with alarm.

“A-Ying!” Cangse Sanren’s scream pierced through the room.

The resentful energy roared like a feral beast, and two glowing crimson eyes flared to life beside Wei Wuxian’s head. From the writhing mass, one spirit separated itself, its gaunt, skeletal face twisted with hunger. Below, the fierce corpses clawed over one another in a frenzied attempt to reach him, their movements frantic and rabid. They and the restless spirits stretched out their hands, eager for the moment Wei Wuxian’s body would be delivered into their grasp.

Where they would rip him apart.

With agonizing slowness, Wei Wuxian was lowered further, his form now within reach of the ravenous yao. Their claws raked toward him, and the moment contact was made, he screamed.

The cultivators watching the scene recoiled in horror. Some turned away, unable to bear the sight; others cried out, their faces pale with shock and disbelief. This… this was what Wei Wuxian had endured? And this was only the beginning? How could anyone, let alone a child, be expected to survive such torment?

"Survive…" Nie Mingjue muttered, his voice strained and barely audible. His expression was a mixture of disbelief and horror, his hands clenched into tight fists. "How in the hell did he survive that?"

No one had an answer. Silence hung over the room. None could fathom the sheer willpower, the unimaginable endurance, it must have taken for Wei Wuxian to come out of such a nightmare alive. The fact that he survived was proof of a strength they couldn't begin to understand—a victory against all odds.

Madam Jin's gaze shifted toward Cangse Sanren and Wei Changze. Her heart clenched as she saw the scene before her: Cangse Sanren collapsing into her husband's arms, her body trembling with grief, her sobs uncontrollable. Wei Changze, though visibly shaken, held her tightly, his own face a mask of barely restrained anguish. He was trying—desperately—to remain composed, but the pain in his eyes betrayed his own silent suffering.

Madam Jin's chest tightened. She couldn't even begin to imagine the agony of witnessing one's child enduring such horrors and being powerless to intervene. It was a torture beyond words, a cruelty that defied comprehension. For the first time, she truly understood the cruelty the cultivation world had inflicted upon Wei Wuxian.

Her thoughts drifted to her own past judgments of him—the disdain, the scorn she had harbored. To think she had once despised this boy, condemned him without knowing the truth. Now, after witnessing the memories that painted his struggles, his pain, and his perseverance, her feelings had shifted.

It was chaos—a brutal tug-of-war. The fierce corpses clawed and dragged him downward with relentless strength, while the spirits fought to pull him upward, their movements just as desperate. Each force pulled from a different direction—left, right, up, down—stretching him in ways no human body was ever meant to endure. The relentless jerking, yanking, and twisting contorted his frame into unnatural angles, each motion accompanied by sharp, agonized screams that echoed through the void.

The sickening sound of something snapping filled the air, unmistakable amidst the chaos. If his arm hadn't been broken before, it certainly was now.

Mianmian averted her eyes, her stomach churning with a growing wave of nausea.

"Can anyone stop this right now?" Jiang Yanli pleaded. Her pleading gaze landed on Baoshan Sanren, who merely glanced at her before turning her attention back to the screen, her expression unreadable.

Nearby, Sizhui struggled to hold back tears, his hands trembling as he clenched them into fists at his sides. Wen Ning noticed the effort it took for the boy to keep his composure and gently placed a steadying hand on his shoulder, silently offering comfort.

Sizhui had been a child back then, too young and innocent to fully grasp the horrors and suffering that surrounded him. But now, as he watched these memories unfold, guilt gnawed at him. He couldn't shake the overwhelming sorrow he felt for his Xian-gege—who had sacrificed so much for him, for his family. Wei Wuxian had willingly cast aside his own future, embracing a life of pain and isolation to protect those he cared for. For that, Sizhui knew he would be forever indebted to Wei Wuxian. His Xian-gege had given him a life filled with love and security—a life far removed from the nightmare Wei Wuxian had endured.

'Please, let this end… someone, help him,' he begged silently, his thoughts a desperate plea.

Meanwhile, the spirits abandoned their passive circling and began their attack in earnest. They surged toward him, invading his body like a swarm of parasites. They tore through his veins, making them bulge grotesquely. Pain like fire and ice coursed through him, and his screams—ragged and raw—faltered into gasping sobs as his body threatened to give out.

Then came the ground beneath him, splitting apart with an ear-splitting roar. From the chasm below, a wave of dense, resentful energy erupted like a tsunami, rushing past the fierce corpses and enveloping Wei Wuxian in its suffocating embrace. Tendrils of dark energy coiled around his limbs, binding him as they dragged him closer to the pool.

"The blood pool," Jiang Wanyin muttered. His hands clenched into fists as he realized. "So, this is it… He was dropped into the heart of the Burial Mounds. That bastard!"

"Is that what it's called? The Blood Pool?" Jiang Fengmian asked, his tone uneasy as he watched the scene unfold on the screen.

"Yes, A-Die," Jiang Wanyin answered. "The Blood Pool… it's almost a living entity. Corpses of those who passed there were thrown in there. That is why the resentment there is so concentrated."

Jiang Fengmian's brows furrowed deeply, his worry became more evident, "I can see that."

The spirits suffocated him; the corpses broke him; the resentful energy invaded his mind.

In a brief, agonizing moment, visions flooded Wei Wuxian's consciousness—the fall of Lotus Pier, the lifeless forms of the Jiangs. His eyes snapped open, burning with determination—not fear, but an unyielding resolve to defy the darkness that sought to consume him.

A skeletal hand clawed at his chest, drawing blood as a thin stream trickled down his arm. The nearest corpses caught the scent, their grotesque mouths drooling with anticipation. One, its hunger palpable, opened its maw to devour him.

"Stop!" Wei Wuxian commanded with a force that momentarily halted the spirit in its track. For an instant.

Suddenly, his body convulsed, muscles trembling uncontrollably as the dark energy consumed him once more.

“Wei Ying!”

“Wei Wuxian!”

“Senior Wei!”

Resentful energy surged into his body, forcing his veins to bulge under the overwhelming strain. Where once he faced a fierce corpse in the tranquil forests of the Cloud Recesses, now he stood amidst the Burial Mounds, battling an innumerable horde.

"Is there no one going to save him?" Wei Changze's thoughts raced, his heart hammering in his chest as he desperately pleaded to the heavens for intervention. Yet, his prayers seemed in vain, falling on deaf ears as his son endured merciless torment.

Wei Wuxian gasped desperately, his breath catching in his throat as he struggled to release a scream, but his lungs couldn’t find the strength to make a sound. His body twisted and contorted violently against the grasp of the spirits, the agony spreading through his limbs like fire consuming his very soul.

Yet, despite the overwhelming pain and the suffocating grip, the corpse paused. Its hunger-filled eyes glinted with confusion, momentarily halting its advance.

Wei Wuxian wasn’t dead—at least, not yet.

The cultivators were silent, watching the boy shake in agony as he fought the resentful energy for control.

Suddenly, Nie Mingjue's self-deprecating laughter broke the silence, a hollow sound filled with bitterness, “Keep him away from the temptation? Yeah right.”

Lan Qiren, standing stoically beside him, lowered his head. In truth, he watched Wei Wuxian’s memories with the hope of guiding him away from the path of demonic cultivation, believing it to be the only way to prevent further chaos. Yet, witnessing the memories unfold, he began to see the truth.

Wei Wuxian had no choice. Without his golden core and stripped of his spiritual abilities, he could no longer be the prodigy they once admired. The title meant nothing if he couldn’t wield a sword. Demonic cultivation was not a choice, but a desperate necessity. He wanted to protect Jiang Wanyin and others, even if it meant embracing a path shunned by society.

No amount of regret could ever undo the suffering, the loss, and the transformation forced upon him.

The spirits which had been swarming inside his body and pressing down on his throat moved back a handful of centimeters. If he had stopped them even a second later, he might have been suffocated.

Two days later, first, they heard Wei Wuxian’s heavy panting. Next, they saw him racing through the valley. Then, they saw what he was running from.

Although fierce corpses usually weren’t very fast, these were the ones in the Burial Mounds. Their resentment was unparalleled by anything on the outside, so, despite their worn-down bodies, even a trained cultivator would struggle against them. Wei Wuxian, with a hand-made splint around his possibly broken leg, had very little chance of escaping one.

And right now, dozens were chasing after him.

Wei Wuxian turned a sharp corner around one of the mounds, then stumbled on his bad leg. His body crashed against a small hill.

“Wei Ying, move!” Wei Changze exclaimed in alarm.

Wei Wuxian, once the fearless cultivator who stood tall against his adversaries, is now crawling himself away, his movements slow and faltering. It could hardly be called running, his battered and broken body barely managed to lift itself off the ground. Each step forward was a struggle, his legs trembling with exhaustion, every attempt to escape met with failure. Despite his suffering, despite the relentless torment he had endured, Wei Wuxian continued to fight for his survival.

Yet, even in his desperation, the limitations were clear—food and water. In a place as desolate and inhospitable as this, the thought of nourishment and water seemed a distant hope.

Nearby, Lan Wangji watched in agony as his heart wept for his beloved. The pain etched across Wei Wuxian’s features, the labored breaths he took—Lan Wangji couldn’t bear to witness. He should’ve considered searching through the Burial Mounds in the past.

A spirit dived, and created a crater where Wei Wuxian had been just a half second before. Wheezing from the strain, Wei Wuxian forced himself to stand up and continue moving.

And four days after that…

“What?!”

“More?!”

Wei Wuxian stumbled through a field of bamboo soaked in resentful energy. Although the fierce corpses were unable to reach him there, the spirits were even faster. By now,

the dirt covering his clothes had turned even the scarlet inner robe pitch black.

No one missed the fact that Wei Wuxian's cheek bones were far too obvious. The lack of food and rest was making him wither away.

Jiang Yanli and Cangse Sanren clenched her firsts.

"And six days after that."

"Again?!" Madam Lan demanded.

"Stop," Wei ordered again, barely able to speak with how dry his throat had become. This time, instead of spasming under the resentful energy running through his body, he merely took a few deep breaths, then forced himself to stand again on shaky legs.

And eight days after that.

"Just stop!" Jiang Cheng's voice cracked with desperation. He should have been the one to save him—he should have searched harder, left no stone unturned in his quest to find Wei Wuxian. It didn't matter if it meant combing through every corner of the earth.

But how could anyone have expect that Wei Wuxian would be cast into the Burial Mounds? It was a place so impossible to fathom for a rescue mission that months had passed before even a single clue emerged. By then, Wei Wuxian had returned, a shadow of his former self —a broken reflection of the carefree, brilliant prodigy Jiang Cheng once knew.

At that time, Jiang Cheng hadn't questioned it. He hadn't allowed himself to think too deeply, consumed by the overwhelming relief of having his brother back, no matter how altered he seemed. But now, witnessning the aftermath of Wei Wuxian's torment, he finally understood the nightmare Wei Wuxian had endured.

The sanity Wei Wuxian maintained, felt like a miracle in itself.

'I'm sorry, I'm sorry, Wei Wuxian,' Jiang Cheng muttered, the weight of guilt and helplessness choking him as tears slid silently down his face.

Jiang Fengmian gripped his son's shoulder to offer some comfort.

Sixteen days after that, the freshest corpse—lacking its legs—crawled slowly atop Wei Wuxian's broken, bloodied body.

Forced to endure the sight, Lan Wangji's grip tightened until his knuckles were pale. The images before him were unbearable, each second adding to the torment.

The corpse moved with a macabre determination, inching its way up Wei Wuxian's fragile form.

It dragged itself over his legs, over his waist, his chest…

Finally reaching his side, it leaned down, its dead eyes fixed on Wei Wuxian's face.

"Move, Wei Wuxian!" Nie Mingjue shouted, his voice raw with desperation.

Slowly, almost imperceptibly, Wei Wuxian's eyes fluttered open. He flinched violently, his breath hitching as his body convulsed under the weight of the corpse pressing against him.

Around Wei Wuxian's gasping neck, its mouth was frozen open mid-bite, revealing decayed, broken teeth stained with drool that dripped down his collarbones. Wei Wuxian could feel the chilling bite of those teeth starting to pierce his skin. His heart raced, the blood pounding in his ears louder than his hoarse, desperate voice could ever scream.

“Off,” he hissed weakly. “Get off me!”

But his screams had long since given out. His throat, shredded from days of relentless cries for help, was too raw to produce sound. His body trembled beneath the weight of the corpse, unable to summon the strength to fight back.

Tears streamed silently down Wei Changze’s face. The anguish of seeing his son endure such was unbearable.

Right. It was Wen Chao’s fault, and wasn’t just him who was responsible for his son’s suffering. There were others—Yu Ziyuan, Lan Qiren, Jiang Fengmian, Jiang Wanyin, Wang Lingjiao, and many more. Each of them, in their own way, contributed to the reality Wei Wuxian was forced to endure.

With a glare sharp enough to pierce the screen, Wei Changze directed his wrath at the corpses. Wen Chao was fortunate to be dead, spared from the vengeance that Wei Changze could so easily have unleashed.

In his embrace was his wife, her face buried in his chest, her body wracked with silent sobs.

In the midst of the torment, Wei Wuxian continued to breathe heavily, his body trembling as he fought against the ever-looming corruption of demonic cultivation. Each breath felt heavier than the last, his muscles straining against the oppressive pull of resentful energy. He swallowed hard, and the sharp pressure from the teeth wrapped around his neck only tightened further.

“Off,” Wei Wuxian commanded harshly, his voice strained and hoarse. However, his breath hitched as a surge of resentful energy surged through his veins, overwhelming him.

The sight alone was enough to make everyone in the room feel sick, a collective wave of nausea spreading among the cultivators witnessing his struggle.

Despite the disturbing sight, the corpses and spirits slowly began to back away, sensing the intense battle Wei Wuxian waged for control. Left alone, he continued to pant, struggling to maintain his grasp on the dark energy as it threatened to consume him. Trembling, he managed to turn over, pushing himself shakily off the ground.

"Circulate it through,"* he urged himself, his voice a whisper of determination. *"Don't let it linger."

Every time Lan Qiren saw a flicker of hope for Wei Wuxian's redemption, he clung to his teachings—reminding himself that there was no justification for inventing demonic cultivation. That nothing could excuse it.

Cangse Sanren had been right to call him an old fool.

Wei Wuxian's arm spasmed violently, then went limp. For a fleeting moment, the resentful energy momentarily won, forcing him into submission.

"No—"

"Please—!" came the desperate plea from nearby cultivators, their voices pleading for his struggle to end, for him to be freed.

"Damn it!" Wei Wuxian shouted, his voice cracking as he forced himself to suppress the overwhelming energy once again. With sheer determination, he bit down on his tongue hard enough to draw blood, the metallic taste flooding his mouth. His bloodshot eyes, wild with the struggle, opened once more.

"Look at the dark circles under his eyes," Jin Zixuan whispered, his voice barely. "Did he even have time to sleep?"

Hearing his observation, Jiang Wanyin and Jin Ling wished he hadn't pointed it out.

Jiang Yanli wept silently once again.

"Figure it out," Wei Wuxian muttered to himself through gritted teeth, his mind clouded with exhaustion. Each breath felt heavier, every second dragging with the weight of his struggle. "Figure it out. Figure it out. Figure it out—get out—find Wen Chao—kill him!"

His eyes turned crimson, and a grin formed on his face.

The world faded to black.

When the cultivators were returned to the white void, they were once again struck silent—overwhelmed by the weight of what they had just witnessed.

Each of them had thought they would witness the creation of something vile—the birth of the Yiling Patriarch—an embodiment of corruption and darkness. Why wouldn't they? After all, demonic cultivation had been portrayed as the ultimate betrayal of traditional values, a path that led only to power-hungry manipulation and chaos. Those who sought to harness its power for themselves believed it to be the inevitable cost of achieving greatness, but deep down, they saw it as something abhorrent, something that tainted everything it touched.

Yet, the truth was far more complex than they had expected. People thrown into the Burial Mounds always met their end. But Wei Wuxian had defied that fate. His existence within those dreadful mounds became proof not to darkness, but to his unparalleled intellect and will to survive—and more importantly, to protect.

It wasn't a decision made for selfish gain. It wasn't a lust for power or dominance. His brilliance lay in his ability to see beyond the limitations imposed by tradition, to craft a solution when others only saw an inevitable downfall.

And yet, they had cast him aside without a second thought. Condemned him for his choices without ever understanding the depth of his struggle. They painted him as a villain, a betrayer of their ideals, blind to the sacrifices he made and the horrors he endured.

What could they say now? The truth was laid bare. Every harsh judgment, every whispered condemnation—none of it held the weight it once did. They had seen firsthand the man who was forced into a role no one else could understand, a man who had to rise above what should have been his ultimate demise to protect those he loved.

There was nothing more they could do except reflect on the tragedy they helped create.

“Did this answer your question?” Baoshan Sanren’s voice cut through the silence, her piercing gaze fixed on the group.

Cangse Sanren couldn’t hold back any longer. “How could you all judge him without understanding him first? What right did you have to condemn him?”

The junior disciples surrounding them were visibly shaken, their heads bowed in guilt. One of them, trembling, spoke up, “We were taught to see him as the Yiling Patriarch—the embodiment of chaos. We thought... we thought he embraced darkness willingly.”

“Of course, it’s easy for the so-called adults to spout such sanctimonious nonsense!” Cangse Sanren’s voice rang out, sharp and furious, as her grief turned into uncontainable rage. “You dare call yourselves righteous cultivators? What a farce! Every single one of you is a disgrace to the title!”

Her voice cracked with raw emotion, but her words did not falter. “He saved you—saved all of you—and he was vilified, and ostracized. Tell me, is this what your so-called righteousness looks like? Self-serving hypocrisy wrapped in the guise of honor?”

The room fell into a heavy silence.

Nie Huaisang, uncharacteristically solemn, turned to the unknown cultivators, “If you all have any decency left, you should stop pretending his sacrifices were anything less than extraordinary.”

No cultivator argued with that.

Nearby, Jiang Cheng’s voice trembled, raw with guilt and self-recrimination. “I should have searched harder. I should have done more. I should have—”

“You did your best, A-Cheng,” Jiang Fengmian interrupted softly, his tone attempting to soothe. “You did not fail. You found him months later, didn’t you? That effort alone was not easy.”

“But—” Jiang Cheng paused, his fists clenching. “I was supposed to protect him. He was my brother, and I failed him at every turn.”

Jiang Yanli then interjected, “A-Cheng, you did all that you could with what you had. What’s important is that you found him and brought him back. Don’t shoulder blame for things you couldn’t have foreseen or controlled.”

Jiang Wanyin merely nodded his head.

Sometime later, grumbles and discussions broke out among the adults, their tones ranging from reluctant acknowledgment to muffled guilt. However, exhaustion also washed over many of them after reliving such a traumatizing memory.

Meanwhile, Baoshan Sanren, who had remained quiet after her earlier outburst, surveyed the faces around her. “Now that the memory has ended, shall we begin, Wen-guniang?” she said, walking toward the unconscious Wei Wuxian.

“W-Wait, what are you going to do, grandmaster?” Cangse Sanren demanded in a panic.

“Don’t worry, I won’t harm him,” Baoshan Sanren reassured gently. “But do you recall what I mentioned earlier?”

Cangse Sanren’s eyes widened as realization dawned upon her, her breath hitching. “You mean…”

“Yes,” Baoshan Sanren affirmed. “Let’s restore Wei Wuxian back to his prime.”

“B-But the risks—” Wei Changze began, his voice filled with concern.

Baoshan Sanren interrupted, “That’s why I’ll be performing this procedure alongside Wen-guniang.”

All eyes turned toward Wen Qing, who stepped forward with a composed yet solemn expression.

“The operation will take place indoors,” Baoshan Sanren continued. “Only Wen-guniang, myself, and Wei Wuxian will be present in the room. Everyone else will need to wait outside.”

Lan Wangji gazed down at his sleeping husband, his expression soft but contemplative, before turning his attention to Wei Wuxian’s parents, whose faces were filled with hope and anticipation.

“Before we proceed, do I have your permission?” Baoshan Sanren asked Cangse Sanren.

At first, Cangse Sanren hesitated, her hands trembling slightly as she looked to her husband, seeking his guidance. Wei Changze smiled at her.

This was for their son—everything rested on this moment.

"Okay, I trust you, grandmaster."

Chapter End Notes

Writing the reactions during the Burial Mounds scene was a challenging process, especially capturing the intense emotions of each cultivator present. I'm not entirely sure if I conveyed everything as effectively as I had hoped; perhaps there's something missing, or maybe it's just a matter of personal perspective. Regardless, I'll review it tomorrow to make any necessary edits, so I appreciate your understanding in advance.

Thank you all for your patience and support—your encouragement means a lot to me!

Happy New Year!

ANNOUNCEMENT

Hey everyone! I hope you're all doing well. I know a lot of you have been eagerly waiting for the next chapters, and believe me, I was just as excited to finally drop them on you. But unfortunately... I have some ***very unfortunate news.***

My laptop decided to pull the ultimate betrayal. Yup—*it died*. Just flatlined out of nowhere. It won't turn on, it won't charge, it's basically a glorified paperweight now. And to make things worse? All the drafts—***all 29,000 freaking words*** I painstakingly wrote for the upcoming *double chapter surprise*—are stuck in there. And guess what? Genius me forgot to turn on the backup.

So yeah, I currently have... nothing. Zero. Zilch. Nada. I'm absolutely gutted, frustrated, and honestly just sad. Writing something that long takes everything out of me—and losing it like that? Soul-crushing. Motivation? In the dirt, gasping for air.

Now I have to either find a way to revive my ancient laptop or bite the bullet and buy a new one. Either way, it's gonna take time, and I'm also in the middle of my on-the-job training, so everything's just crashing down at once. Love that for me.

I'll update you on my X (Twitter) account once I figure things out—whether I manage to Frankenstein my old laptop back to life or get a new one altogether.

I want to apologize because I know some of you have been patiently (or maybe not so patiently) waiting for those chapters. I was really looking forward to sharing them too. But for now... it's going to be delayed. When will they be posted? I genuinely don't know. Could be soon, could be a while—life's being a chaotic mess.

But please know this: the story is *not* abandoned, and it is *not* discontinued. It's just... momentarily cursed.

Thank you so much for sticking with me through this digital heartbreak. Your patience means everything.

Stay tuned—and send me all your good vibes, tech blessings, and maybe even a functioning laptop if you have one lying around. 😭

P.S: I am uploading this using my phone HAHAHA

ANOTHER ANNOUNCEMENT

Hey hey hey, everyone! Long time no post—did you miss me? (Say yes. Lie if you must.)

So, if you've been lurking on my X account, you might've seen the news: I GOT A NEW LAPTOP! 🎉 Courtesy of my amazing mom (shoutout to the queen herself 👑). Now, you'd think that the moment I got my hands on that beautiful, shiny device, I'd immediately dive back into writing, right?

Well... plot twist. 😅

As much as I *wanted* to write the moment the laptop touched my fingertips, life said, "Not so fast, writer girl." I had a mountain of catch-up work to do because, you know, no digital access = surviving in prehistoric times. So I've been clawing my way back to digital civilization these past few weeks.

BUT HERE'S THE BIGGEST NEWS OF ALL: I JUST GRADUATED LAST JULY 12!! 🎓💐💖

Yes, you heard that right—I made it!! I officially survived the academic jungle, finished exams, OJT's, and crossed the finish line in one piece (mentally questionable, but we're here). I'm honestly so proud of myself for not giving up, even on the days when I wanted to cry into a pillow and run away from everything.

After the ceremony, my family and I celebrated *hard*. Food, laughter, rest—I basically became a pampered cat for seven days straight.

Now that we're back home and the celebratory confetti has settled, I find myself staring into the void like,

"So… what now?"
"Where do I even start?"
"Am I supposed to have my life figured out now?"
Yeah, no thanks. Existential dread, please hold.

So instead of spiraling, I've decided to do the next best thing: **go back to writing**. 🎉 Though, tiny hiccup—my old files weren't backed up (I know, I know… tragic), so I'm starting the next chapters completely from scratch. But hey, maybe this is the universe's way of saying, *"Make it better this time, babe."* So I will. For you. For me.

Once the next chapter is done, I'll be diving into the thrilling world of job hunting! Wish me luck as I chase my dream of becoming a ✈️ future FA (Flight Attendant, not Final Answer, just to be clear).

Thanks for sticking with me through all the delays, breakdowns, glow-ups, and now… fresh starts. Let's gooo! 💪💻💫

Please drop by the Archive and comment to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!